ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

MAY 5

PRICE 10¢

A Hard-Boiled Tenderfoot

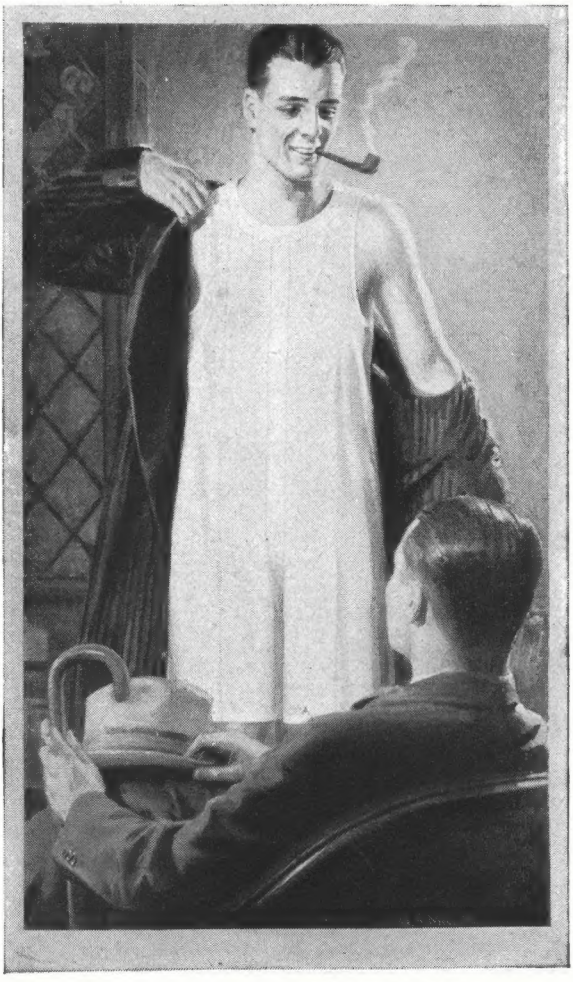
by J. U. Giesy

Also Stories by

Fred MacIsaac
Joseph T. Kescel
Laurance M. Hare
and others

No man needs better...

Style...Comfort...Fit



HERE is the finest Union Suit you can buy... and all it costs is ONE DOLLAR! But be sure you ask for Topkis. For in Topkis you get the biggest Dollar's worth of Underwear value.

Millions of men buying millions of Suits have made it possible to give you the fine, durable weaves—the big, roomy garments—and that stylish, careful tailoring, which make Dollar Topkis the outstanding Underwear of the nation.

Fine durable fabrics — plain or fancy weaves. Men's Union Suits, $1.00, Shirts and Drawers, 75c each, Boys' Union Suits, 50c and 75c, Children's Waist Union Suits, 50c and 75c, Misses' Bloomer Union Suits, 50c and 75c.

Topkis Togs — Our new line of "athletic shorts", called Topkis Togs, come in white and assorted combinations — tailored the careful Topkis way.

TOPKIS BROTHERS CO.
Wilmington - Delaware

General Sales Offices:
93 Worth Street at Broadway, New York

One Dollar

TOPKIS

ATHLETIC UNDERWEAR

Bend...reach...twist ...stretch! The Topkis Stabilizer gives you unlimited freedom. Launders perfectly. 100% fabric stretch—no rubber—that's the secret!

AT THE TOP OF UNDERWEAR FAME STANDS THE TOPKIS NAME

What is the difference between a high-priced lighter and the POCKET-Imp at $1.50!

Absolutely none at all so far as UTILITY is concerned

And by *Utility* we mean everything in a lighter that makes for permanent service satisfaction! Convenience—dependability—compactness—up-to-dateness of design—simplicity of construction and operation—the sturdiness to withstand hard usage—and a "dressiness" of appearance that merits long-sustained pride of ownership.

All these! And each and every one of them is assured you in this $1.50 Lighter! You can pay a lot more, if you want to, just for the privilege of saying you bought these qualities in a fancier and costlier "livery". But you can't pay less without deliberately taking chances on one or more of these basic essentials of good value. *Compare these "Seven Supreme Features" of the "Pocket-Imp" with those of any other lighter on the market at any price!* See them—and *test* them—at your Druggist's, Tobacconist's, or you favorite shopping place among Jewelers, Hardware Dealers, Stationers, Gift Shops, or Sporting Goods and Department Stores.

Or, if your dealer can't supply you, mail Coupon, and we'll send you a "Pocket-Imp" direct, in any of these finishes: BLACK, TAN, LIGHT BROWN, DARK BROWN, CREAM, PEARL GRAY, SUEDE, COPENHAGEN BLUE, HUNTER GREEN, CHINESE RED, MAROON, NICKEL.

7 Supreme Features of the "Pocket-Imp" that Tell the Whole Story of Lighter Satisfaction!

1—Smooth-Top Protected Mechanism.

2—Powerful and Positive Ignition.

3—"One-Hand" Operation.

4—Simple, Easy Adjustment of Sparking Action.

5—Simple, Compact Design.

6—Sturdy, Durable Construction.

7—Handsome "Leather-Effect" Finish in 12 Alluring Colors.

Send no Money. Simply fill out and mail this Coupon, then pay the postman $1.50 upon delivery.

ASSOCIATED NOVELTY PRODUCTS CORPORATION
56 Pine Street, New York City

Manufacturers and Exclusive Distributors of "Ancor" Popular-Priced Specialties

Associated Novelty Products Corporation, 56 Pine St., New York

Send me by Parcel Post prepaid, a "Pocket-Imp" Lighter in.....finish, for which I will pay the postman $1.50 upon delivery. (Outside of U.S.A. and U.S. possessions, remit $1.75 with Order.)

Name .....

Address .....

City..... *State*.....

My Favorite Store is.....

12 ALLURING "LEATHER-EFFECT" FINISHES

ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W. C. 2
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE., 111 Rue Réaumur
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary
By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; in Canada, $7.00, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered
PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

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Most Amazing INVENTION in 25 years

"Cleans Up" for Agents

FREE MACHINE FOR AGENTS

$90 WEEKLY IN SPARE TIME!

Men, here is a wonder—the most sensational invention of the age! If you're looking for a rapid fire seller—an item that nets you 100% profit—an item that sells itself to 7 out of 10 men **on demonstration**—I've got it in Ve-Po-Ad, the amazing new vest pocket adding machine!

Sells for $2.95—You Make $1.65

This most remarkable invention does all the work of a $300 adding machine, yet fits the vest pocket and sells for only $2.95! It sells on sight to storekeepers, business men, and everyone who uses figures—and makes you over 100% profit on every sale! Ve-Po-Ad does any kind of figuring in a jiffy, yet weighs but 4 oz. Counts up to a billion. Shows total visible at all times. Perfectly accurate, lightning fast. Never makes a mistake or gets out of order. Over 100,000 in daily use!

Get Your Machine FREE

Live wire salesmen are dropping everything else and flocking to Ve-Po-Ad. Ve-Po-Ad brings them quick money and lots of it. Shapiro out in California made $175 in one week! You can "clean up" too! Only 10 sales a day in spare time will bring YOU over $95.00 a week! You need no previous sales experience—Ve-Po-Ad sells itself! If you are really interested in earning a steady, substantial income, write at once for full details of my **MONEY-MAKING PLAN** and **FREE VE-PO-AD** given to new Agents. Do it **NOW—TODAY!**

C. M. CLEARY, Dept. 905
184 W. WASHINGTON STREET CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

SOME THERMOMETER

18 inches wide, 80 inches long

Jumbo Thermometer, Barometer and Eight-Day Clock

This is the biggest thing in advertising. It's not only big in feet and inches, but in dollars and cents. Scores of men are making big successes by selling advertising space on the "JUMBO."

$180 FOR A DAY AND A HALF WORK

Display space in public places and on prominent corners is easily secured for the big "JUMBO" Thermometer. The fourteen advertising spaces go like hot cakes—some of our men sell out the thermometer in a day and a half or less.

THE CHANEY MFG. CO., 500 E. Pleasant Street, Springfield, O.

AGENTS

Here is a new Household Device that beats a vacuum cleaner and all attachments. It not only sweeps thoroughly and cleans walls and ceilings but also washes and dries windows and scrubs and mops floors. Requires no electricity. Every home a prospect. Only $2.95. Over half profit. Write your name and address at the edge of this ad and mail to us today for complete selling terms.

HARPER MFG. CO.
541 9th St., Fairfield, Iowa

"How we saved our first $500"

"MARY and I had been married four years, but we couldn't save a cent. Fact is, we were constantly in debt and I was always worried for fear I would lose my position.

"Then one night I saw that something must be done, so I told Mary I was going to take up a course with the International Correspondence Schools. 'I've been hoping you would do that,' she said. 'I know you can earn more money if you really try.'

"So I started studying after supper at night, in the spare time that used to go to waste. It wasn't hard and pretty soon I began to see it was helping me in my work. In three months a new position was open and the Boss said he'd give me a chance at it because he'd heard I was studying with the I. C. S.

"Well, that was the start. Before the end of the year I received another raise in salary and we began to save a little each week. We've got $500 in the bank now and we're going to have a lot more soon. The Boss says he's going to give me a still better position if I keep on studying with the I. C. S."

For nearly forty years, the International Correspondence Schools have been helping men to win promotion, to earn more money, to get ahead in business and in life.

You, too, can have the position you want in the work you like best. Yes, you can.

At least, find out how by marking and mailing the coupon printed below. It doesn't cost you a penny or obligate you in any way to do this, but it may be the means of changing your entire life. **Do it now!**

Mail This Coupon for Free Booklet

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
"The Universal University"
Box 2234-D, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, **"Who Wins and Why,"** and full particulars about the subject before which I have marked X in the list below:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
☐ Personnel Management	☐ Business Correspondence
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Show Card and Sign Lettering
☐ Accounting and C. P. A. Coaching	☐ Stenography and Typing
	☐ English
☐ Cost Accounting	☐ Civil Service
☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
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☐ Spanish ☐ French	☐ High School Subjects
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☐ Railroad Positions	☐ Structural Engineer
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☐ Civil Engineer	☐ Automobile Work
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Airplane Engines
☐ Metallurgy and Mining	☐ Agriculture ☐ Navigation
☐ Steam Engineering	☐ Mathematics ☐ Radio

Name.....

Street Address.....

City..... State.....

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS AND SALESMEN WANTED

Agents and Distributors. We pay $85 a week from start introducing amazing new invention that converts any washboiler into a real washing machine in one minute. Quick demonstration clinches sale. Works wholly automatic, no electricity, gas engine or hand power needed. Does big family washing in 30 min. Wonderful all-year seller. Tremendous demand. No competition. Sells for only few dollars complete on a money-back guarantee. No capital or experience necessary. You make 100% profit. $8,000 to $10,000 a year easily. Write for FREE Demonstrating Outfit offer at once. Dept. 4-28, MERLE MFG. CO., Aurora, Ill.

AGENTS MAKE $10.00 DAILY SELLING NON-SPLASH WATER-FILTERS ON SIGHT. BEST CANVASSER'S ARTICLE ON MARKET. Investigate. Write for particulars DESK 25, SEED FILTER COMPANY, 73 Franklin Street, New York.

Don't Sell For Others. Employ Agents Yourself. Make your own products. Toilet Articles, Household Specialties, etc. 500% profit. Valuable booklet free. NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC LABORATORIES, 1961W Broad, Richmond, Va.

SEND NAME, ADDRESS ON POSTCARD. Free introductory copy Modern Salesology Magazine; 1000 money making opportunities offered by big reliable firms; no obligations. SALESOLOGY MAGAZINE, Desk B-228, 500 No. Dearborn, Chicago.

AGENTS—WE START YOU IN BUSINESS AND HELP YOU SUCCEED. NO CAPITAL OR EXPERIENCE NEEDED. SPARE OR FULL TIME. YOU CAN EASILY EARN $50-$100 WEEKLY. WRITE MADISON MANUFACTURERS, 564 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

NEW HOUSEHOLD DEVICE washes-dries windows, sweeps, cleans walls, scrubs, mops. Costs less than brooms. Over half profit. HARPERS, 101 Third St., Fairfield, Iowa.

MAKE $25.00 DAILY SELLING COLORED RAINCOATS AND SLICKERS, RED, BLUE, GREEN, ETC., $2.95, Hat Free. Commissions daily. Outfit FREE. ELLIOTT BRADLEY, 230 So. Wells, Dept. AA-5, Chicago.

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Wonderful "Whisper-It" Mouthpiece For Telephones; gives secrecy in conversation. Every telephone user a prospect. Retails $1.00. Liberal profits. Write for full selling proposition. Colytt Laboratories, Dept. M, 565 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—TOILET ARTICLES, PERFUMES AND SPECIALTIES. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERMA CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS WANTED TO SELL MEN'S HATS DIRECT FROM FACTORY. Better grade, latest style creations at price of lower grades. Write for catalog. MODEL HAT MFG. CO., Dept. M-6, East Orange, N. J.

STOUT? Send for free Folder. Abdominal Reducing Supporters to measure from $6.00 and up. We also make Belts for after operation, Hernia, Prolapsed Stomach. G. WISK, Mfr., Dept. 229 Western Mutual Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif.

Make Big Money—Sell our Nationally known All Wool Tailored to Individual Measure Suits. $23.50—$29.50. Commissions $4—$5. Your big opportunity. Large Sample Outfit **Free.** Write General Tailoring Co., Dept. C5, 529 S. Franklin, Chicago.

MEN—WOMEN, $1.80 An Hour—No Less. Large Mfg. Co., Est. 30 years, starting new Medallion department. Amazing new sales plan. First 22 agents averaged $1.80 an hour steady. Only 1 agent wanted in locality. Your own photo free as sample. Art Medallion Co., Dept. 75, corner Campbell and Jackson, Chicago.

AGENTS—BRUSH AND BROOM CATALOG with Sample Case Assortment of 50 different kinds of Brushes sent without deposit to responsible Brush Salesmen. NATIONAL FIBRE BROOM CO., Dept. M, St. Louis, Mo.

MAKE $45 TO $100 WEEKLY—full or part time—and liberal bonus, selling BETTER QUALITY all-wool made-to-measure suits and overcoats. Save $18.50 per suit. No experience necessary. Commissions paid in advance. We furnish handsome large swatch samples and complete instructions FREE. Write today! W. Z. GIBSON, 500 Throop St., Dept. S-409, Chicago.

A GOLD MINE—TAKE ORDERS LIQUID MEND FOR FABRICS—HOSIERY. STOPS RUNS. EVERY WOMAN BUYS. 100 OTHER FAST SELLERS. J. E. JOHNSON CO., DEPT. 5165, 6129 WENTWORTH, CHICAGO.

AGENTS: $75 WEEKLY IN SPARE TIME, INTRODUCING "CHIEFTAIN" SILKS, BROADCLOTHS, WORK SHIRTS. You take orders. We deliver and collect. New Group sales plan. Brand New Style Book and Samples, Mailed FREE. CINCINNATI SHIRT CO., Shop 1769, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS—STORIES WANTED

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. WE COMPOSE MUSIC. OUR COMPOSER WROTE MANY SONG HITS. MONARCH MUSIC COMPANY, 236 WEST 55TH ST. (NEAR BROADWAY), DEPT. 109, NEW YORK.

STORY IDEAS WANTED FOR PHOTOPLAYS AND MAGAZINES. BIG DEMAND. REVISED, TYPED, PUBLISHED, SOLD ON COMMISSION. SEND MANUSCRIPTS FOR FREE CRITICISM. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORPORATION, 409 Security Bldg., Santa Monica & Western Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

MONEY MADE IN MICHIGAN POTATOES. $10 DOWN NOW AND EASY TERMS BUYS LAND NEAR MARKETS, Lakes, Streams. Write today. SWIGART & CO., M-1276, First National Bank Building, Chicago.

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Plays, Musical comedies and revues, minstrel music, black-face skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 43, Chicago.

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EARN $120 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. WE ASSIST YOU TO A POSITION AFTER COMPLETION OF THREE MONTHS' SPARE TIME HOME STUDY COURSE, OR REFUND YOUR MONEY. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30. STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

MEN—EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY; travel; make secret investigations; reports; salaries; expenses. Write AMERICAN FOREIGN DETECTIVE AGENCY, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

Work for "Uncle Sam." Steady jobs. $95.00 to $275.00 month. Men—women, 18—50. Paid vacations. Sample examination coaching and list positions FREE. Write immediately. FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. C-1, Rochester, N. Y.

EARN MONEY AT HOME OIL PAINTING PHOTOS. Fascinating work with big pay. $35.00 to $100.00 a week and up. No experience necessary. We teach you. Professional Outfit Furnished. Write for FREE book. NATIONAL ART SCHOOL, Dept. 6-5, 1008 N. Dearborn, Chicago.

FOREST RANGER POSITIONS pay $125—$200 month; nice cabin. Hunt, trap, patrol. Get free list National Forests immediately. RAYSON INST., Dept. A-14, Denver, Colo.

EARN $20 TO $50 A WEEK RETOUCHING PHOTOS— MEN OR WOMEN. NO SELLING OR CANVASSING. WE TEACH YOU AT HOME, FURNISH WORKING OUTFIT AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICE. WRITE TODAY. ARTCRAFT STUDIOS, Dept. 71, 427 Diversey Parkway, Chicago.

FOREIGN WORK—MEN SEEKING WORK BEAUTIFUL SOUTH AMERICA, OIL, FRUIT, MINING COMPANIES, ETC., SHOULD WRITE US. SOUTH AMERICAN SERVICE BUREAU, 14,600 ALMA, DETROIT, MICH.

MEN, GET FOREST RANGER JOB; $125—$200 MONTH AND HOME FURNISHED; HUNT, FISH, TRAP. For details, write NORTON INST., 1497 Temple Court, Denver, Colo.

ADDRESS ENVELOPES AT HOME—Spare Time. Experience unnecessary. Dignified work. $15—$25 weekly easy. Send 2c stamp for particulars. MAZELLE, Dept. DC, Gary, Indiana.

WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES WANTED. New invention prevents shoulder straps slipping. No more discomfort. Women adore it. Write for particulars and Free offer. LINGERIE "V" CO., 16 Lake St., North Windham, Conn.

LADIES—GOOD PAY for plain sewing, easy, spare time. No selling. Stamped envelope brings particulars. AGEE DRESS CO., Terminal Annex Building, Dept. MCN, Philadelphia, Pa.

$6—$18 A DOZEN DECORATING PILLOW TOPS AT HOME. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. PARTICULARS FOR STAMP. TAPESTRY PAINT CO., 128, LAGRANGE, IND.

LINIMENT

ABSORBINE, JR., the antiseptic liniment, is soothing and healing. Gives prompt relief from aches and pains, sore muscles and sprains and bruises. Guards against infection. At all druggists, $1.25. Write for free trial bottle. W. F. YOUNG, INC., Springfield, Mass.

PHONOGRAPH RECORDS

To introduce our popular line of Harmony Records, we will ship Postpaid anywhere in the U. S., 3 double face records (6 selections), latest releases for $1.00. Can be played on any machine. Catalogs containing thousands of selections sent free. TRIANGLE RECORD CO., 58 Triangle St., Buffalo, N. Y.

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ALL SPEECH DEFECTS EASILY AND PERMANENTLY CURED. 10,000 CASES SUCCESSFULLY TREATED. EST. 25 YEARS. SEND FOR LARGE FREE CATALOG AND FULL INFORMATION. MILLARD INSTITUTE OF NORMAL SPEECH, 2332 MILLARD BLDG., MILWAUKEE, WIS.

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TOBACCO HABIT BANISHED. NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU HAVE BEEN A VICTIM, no matter how strong your craving, no matter in what form you use tobacco, there is help for you. Just send postcard or letter for our Free Book. It explains everything. NEWELL PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 812, Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.

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PATENTS—Write for our free Guide Book, "How To Obtain A Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of Invention for Inspection and Advice Free. Reasonable Terms. Prompt Service. Highest References. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—Write for our guide book, "How to Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

EMPLOYMENT FOR 500 MEN AT ONCE

Mitchell, So. Dak.—Walter M. Willy, of this city, is in need of 500 men to help market his new and amazing invention which makes glare from passing automobiles impossible. This device fits and matches all cars. It can be installed in a minute. It is inexpensive. It is entirely different from anything else previously used for this purpose.

The inventor is now ready to place this remarkable discovery on the market and has an introductory free sample offer to mail you. Write Mr. Willy today. Charles Hickey wrote for this free sample offer. Since then Mr. Hickey has made $4,931.50 profit and earned $977.25 in prizes. To get this liberal offer simply write your name and address, enclose this ad in an envelope and address it to W. M. Willy, G-301 Logan Bldg., Mitchell, S. Dak.

MAIL CLERKS
TRAVEL FOR "UNCLE SAM"

$158 to $225 month. Mail Carriers (City—Rural). Write IMMEDIATELY for free 32-page book, sample coaching and full particulars with list of U. S. Gov't. positions obtainable. Tell me how to get a position.
FRANKLIN INSTITUTE Dept. C-293 ROCHESTER, N. Y.

An idyl of an idling stream

A POEM of motion, the "Old Town" glides across the mirror stream. . . . Reflections dance on tiny ripples. . . . Colors blend and clash in riot. . . . At a stroke of the blade the canoe darts forward, swift and smooth and light.

"Old Towns" are patterned after actual Indian models. Their graceful lines mean steadiness and easy handling. Priced as low as $67. From dealer or factory.

New catalog gives complete information about sailing canoes, square-stern canoes, dinghies, etc. Also fast, seaworthy boats for *Outboard Motors*. Write for free copy today. OLD TOWN CANOE CO., 825 Middle Street, Old Town, Maine.

"Old Town Canoes"

FREE! Book "How to Marcel Wave Your Own Hair," to all who reply.

Sensational New French Invention Gives

A Perfect Marcel Wave in 15 Minutes —costs only 2¢

Not a concoction from a bottle—not a sticky, messy lotion—not a "trick" brush—not a "magic" cap—not an antiquated "curling" device—not a "scientific" substitute for the old-fashioned kid curler. This amazing French invention is *positively guaranteed actually to marcel wave any head of hair in 15 minutes at a cost of less than 2c.*

By Mlle. Renee Duval

FROM Paris I have brought to American women the greatest beauty secret of all time. French hairdressers have guarded it jealously for many years. This secret will enhance the beauty of any woman's hair a hundredfold. And there is but one simple, easy thing to do. Now every American woman and girl can know, for the first time, the real and true secret of the French woman's always perfectly marcelled hair—a thing that has caused American women much amazement.

Simple to Use—Perfect in Results

It is all so simple—a small, inexpensive, easy-to-use thing—the invention of a famous French hairdresser—it is called the Marcelwaver. I brought it to America—my friends here perfected it—then sent it to 1,000 American women to try for themselves. It gave such perfect results—proved of such great convenience—saved those who tried it so much money—that every one of these 1,000 women asked to keep it—and their friends sent me orders for thousands of Marcelwavers.

AGENTS!
Men and Women

Marcelwaver is taking American women by storm. Biggest earnings ever being made by agents everywhere. You must get in on ground floor before all territory is taken. Send—today—for complete information—all FREE!

This Secret Yours FREE!

Do not send me money—just name and address. I'll at once send you this secret—and a FREE copy of my famous book, "How to Marcel Wave Your Own Hair." Send today.

Mlle. Renee Duval
MARCELWAVER COMPANY
Dept. 150-E Cincinnati, Ohio

Mlle. Renee Duval, Dept. 150-E
MARCELWAVER CO., Cincinnati, Ohio

Please send me at once your precious secret of a perfectly marcelled head of hair in 15 minutes at a cost of less than 2c. This information must be FREE to me.

( ) *Check here if interested in agent's offer.*

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

New Model

Pocket Ben

The new model Pocket Ben watch has won universal good will.

You'll find it as good looking as it is dependable. Millions of men carry it with pride and confidence.

Sold everywhere for $1.50.

Built by the makers of Big Ben and other Westclox

WESTERN CLOCK COMPANY
La Salle, Illinois

New Westclox Auto Clock

$2.50 Attractive, convenient, reliable. Fits any car. Quickly attached on dash or above wind-shield.

Relief from Curse of CONSTIPATION

A PROMINENT physician, of Battle Creek, Mich., says: "Constipation is a disease of civilization. Wild men and wild animals do not suffer from this malady, which is responsible for more misery than any other single cause."

But immediate relief from the scourge of constipation has been found. The Research Laboratories of the United Drug Company in Boston have developed a tablet which attracts water from the system into the dry, lazy evacuating bowel called the colon. This fluid softens and loosens the sluggish food waste and causes a gentle, complete evacuation.

Rexall Orderlies (the name of these wonderful tablets) form no habit and never require an increase of the dose.

Stop suffering from constipation. Chew a pleasant-tasting Rexall Orderly tonight before retiring and feel fine tomorrow. Rexall Orderlies are sold only at Liggett and Rexall Drug Stores. Get a package of 24 tablets for 25 cents.

Save with Safety at your

Rexall

DRUG STORE

Liggett's are also Rexall stores

There is one near you — You will recognize it by this sign

Stop Using a Truss

For almost a quarter of a century satisfied thousands report success without delay from work. Stacks of sworn statements on file. Process of recovery natural, so no subsequent use for a truss.

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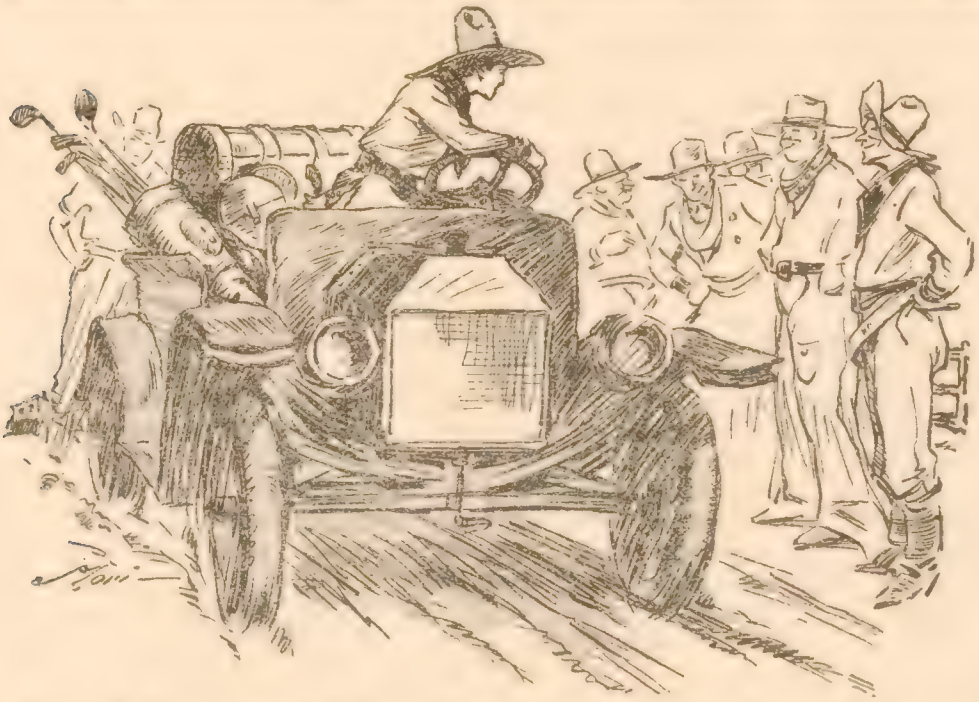


A Hard-Boiled Tenderfoot

By J. U. GIESY

Co-Author of Semi-Dual Stories

They called him "The Nut" because he acted so crazy, but when he finished they decided he was crazy like a fox

CHAPTER I.

MR. NUTTING'S ARRIVAL.

THERE was an element of the dramatic in the arrival of Mr. Richard Nutting at the Bar-Bee ranch. The end of a long day was at hand; from west to east a red gold light was cast across the Bar-Bee establishment. A feather of smoke curled from the cookhouse pipe. From the cookhouse itself came the clatter of pots and pans, hinting of sustenance and refreshment in the course of preparation for the inside man.

In the shade of the long bunk house porch the Bar-Bee riders were gathered in those postures of relaxation

which men of their type adopt. They were a bronze-faced, level-eyed, apparently listless group. There were eight of them, counting Bear Paw Rawlins, the foreman.

In a day and age when other interests were gradually crowding the open range out of existence, the Bar-Bee still ran an important number of cows. Old Jed Brewster, who had established it forty years before, still gazed from the ranch house over a lordly expanse of acres, plateau and mountain valley, where strayed his herds, cared for by his waddies in spring and summer and early autumn, culled as it were for shipment from the nearest rail head in the fall.

Of course ranching was no longer what it had been. But old Jed had done well enough in days past, and he liked the life with the habit of its living. There was a quiet sort of feudalism about it, even if instead of thirty or more men on his pay roll he now could boast of but eight. And this evening the atmosphere hovering over the ranch, his employees waiting for their evening meal, was one of utter peaceful quiet.

Abruptly that quiet was shattered by a noise.

Paragonah Charley, so called from the Utah hamlet of his birth, flung up his head very much in the fashion of a startled horse. In so far as he could compare it to anything, the disturbance resembled a tin roof caught in a cyclone. He directed his squinted gray eyes toward the road which led from the main highway to the Bar-Bee, and detected a cloud of approaching dust. Equally he marked the fact that his fellows were gazing in the same direction.

"Any of you birds send for a junk man?" he inquired.

"Not any," said Bear Paw Rawlins. "But sounds like he'd come without any sendin'. An' he seems ter be in a hurry ter git here."

The dust cloud supported his words. It advanced swiftly to a crescendo of complaining metal, disclosed a dark spot like a nucleus in its lower and forward part.

To the watchers the latter soon showed as a small car of a popular make, carrying a tail of steam above its radiator cap. Bumping, rattling, and pounding, the machine came straight toward the bunk house group and stopped with a groan of brakes.

From its seat a thin-faced, dark-eyed individual met the glances of the eight men with a smiling flash of teeth.

"Good evening, gentlemen. I reckon this is the Bar-Bee ranch," he remarked.

"Well, we won't argue about it, stranger," Bear Paw Rawlins told him. "Because yore reckonin' is right."

"That being the case," the new arrival nodded, "I presume I might as well unload."

He uncurled himself from behind the wheel and stepped out of the machine, which still boiled and grumbled.

Paragonah Charley gasped. Thus revealed, the unknown justified the act. Standing some five feet ten inches in height and proportionately built, he showed in a somewhat remarkable garb. His head was crowned by a palpably new and palpably expensive hat of the type now made famous by both President Coolidge and Tom Mix.

His well turned torso was cased in a red flannel shirt, about the collar of which was knotted a purple neckerchief. From the hips down, his nether extremities were covered by flaring leather chaps, below which showed high-heeled boots adorned with intricate stitching and spurs. And as a final touch, a leather belt and holster, from which protruded the butt of a heavy revolver, sagged about his flanks.

"Are you birds seein' the same thing I do?" Charley questioned *sotto*

voce. "Ain't anybody takin' movin' pitchers in this district, is there?"

"Not as I know of," said Joe Maddelena, the hardest riding, darkest visaged waddy the Bar-Bee had.

Whether he heard or not, the newcomer gave no sign. He walked to the back of the car, which supported a truck body, and lifted out a trunk.

Thereafter he removed a collection of other baggage, at sight of which the eyes of the Bar-Bee riders widened more and more; a bag of golf clubs, two tennis racquets in canvas covers, two rifles in cases, a mandolin, ditto, a suitcase, and lastly a saddle of the English racing type, at sight of which Swede Anderson, blue eyed and sandy haired, drawled an interrogation:

"Askin' yore pardon, stranger, air you collectin' postage stamps?"

"Why—not that I know of." The new arrival straightened from piling his dunnage.

And Paragonah emitted a snicker. "Don't show your ignorance, Swede," he admonished. "The gentleman's a flivver buster. He rides 'em with spurs."

"Shut up!" Bear Paw advanced a step to face the man beside the battered truck. "An' now you've got all thet stuff unloaded, just what do you aim to do with it, ef you'll excuse my askin'?" he inquired.

"Why"—once more the newcomer flashed strong teeth—"you see, I'm expecting to get a job. And—when one reaches one's intended destination, the natural thing is for one to unload, is it not?"

"That depends," Bear Paw said in the way of one who considers a weighty point. "You was expectin' to git a job—here?"

"Why—yes." Again the stranger smiled. "See here—let me introduce myself. I'm Richard Nutting—"

"Squirrel food, by golly, I knew it!" Paragonah chuckled.

"Shut up, Charley," Bear Paw directed for the second time; and turned again to Mr. Nutting. "I'm Bear Paw Rawlins, foreman of this outfit," he said. "But the p'int is, Mr. Nutting, thet it occurs to me thet in unloadin' this mess of truck you may hev been a leetle premachure—at least on the basis of gittin' a job."

"Oh, yes, yes." Nutting removed his hat, ran a hand through a heavy thatch of brown hair, and once more smiled. "If I don't land the job, you mean. But—" His eyes strayed to the ranch house, a large two-story brick structure set some distance to the south among box elder and cottonwood trees. "I assume your manager is in the house?"

For a moment Bear Paw did not answer. Rather, he hooked his thumbs in his belt and regarded the speaker with something like a sneer.

Sometimes at the very first meeting men strike out from one another an antagonistic spark. And now it seemed to the Bar-Bee riders that here was a case—that between this newcomer and Bear Paw already was dislike, on the foreman's part at least.

"You assume a lot, it looks like," he said gruffly at last. "But speakin' of managers, mostly I manage myself."

"Eh?" Again Mr. Nutting smiled. "Oh, yes, yes—I see. But, in a manner of speaking—"

"Speakin' or actin'," Bear Paw cut him short. "Now, I don't know who you air, or what. You say yore name is Nutting—an' you shore look the fust part of it; you shore look like a nut. An' this here ain't no dude ranch. So ef you don't mind bein' a leetle more explicit, jus' what sort of a job was you aimin' ter git?"

"Why—why—" For the first time Mr. Nutting seemed really abashed. He turned his hat in his hands before he essayed an answer:

"Why—I thought I might be a—a—I thought I might herd cattle."

"My Gawd!" Joe Maddelena groaned. "I betcha thet's why he wore them clothes."

"Dry up, the bunch of you!" Bear Paw scowled. "Herdin' cattle, eh?" He swung back to Nutting. "In a flivver?"

"Oh, no, no," Mr. Nutting hastened to protest. "I expect to ride a horse. I—brought along a saddle." He indicated the leather pad on top of his pile of luggage.

"Yip! Yip! Yip! Ride 'em, cowboy!" Paragonah Charley leaped suddenly into the air and clicked his heels.

Bear Paw gave him a glance.

"Kin you ride?" he inquired.

"Oh—if the horse isn't too rough," said Mr. Nutting.

"Kin you sling a rope?" Rawlins's lip curled.

"Sling a rope?" Mr. Nutting repeated vaguely. And then he brightened. "Oh, yes—you mean throw a lasso, I take it. Well—no. Not as well as some, perhaps. But—I could learn, I fancy."

"Fancy," Swede Anderson murmured, "is right. He's about as fancy as they make 'em."

"Can you fan a gun?" Bear Paw's question cracked.

"Well—I'm not a gunman, really." Mr. Nutting looked down.

"Then—what's this for?"

The heavy hand which had earned Bear Paw his name shot out, wrenched the revolver from Mr. Nutting's holster, and shook it beneath his eyes.

And Mr. Nutting eyed it with no particular interest. "Why, I—I understood cattlemen wore them," he offered explanation, his glance running over the men who watched him. "But I see you—don't. Sorry. You see, I bought most of my outfit in Paducah. That's in Kentucky, you know—"

"Maybe," Bear Paw interrupted. "I'm plumb indifferent as to whar it is. What's givin' me a laugh is yore ambition to—herd cattle. Mr. Nutting, yo're a joke. You kin ride a leetle, ef the hoss ain't playful. But you cain't sling a rope an' you cain't shoot. B'ilin' thet down, you cain't work an' you cain't—fight. Well, as I said befo'—yore name shore appears to fit."

He flung the gun in the dust.

There came a little silence. Mr. Nutting eyed his maltreated weapon, and then he stooped and picked it up. A slight flush crept into his cheeks.

"Oh, as to fighting," he said—and afterward Paragonah always maintained that his eyes had been hard, although his voice was still soft—"there are other ways besides with a gun, Mr. Rawlins."

"Yeah?" Bear Paw's word and his grin were but an added taunt.

"Yes," Mr. Nutting nodded. "And I'm not sure but I like them best. Perhaps I'm a bit primitive in my tastes. Almost any one can learn to shoot, but it takes a real man to get very far with his fists."

He wiped the gun on a sleeve of his shirt and slid it back into its holster.

"Thar's a lot of real men in the West," Bear Paw rejoined with meaning, while the Bar-Bee riders waited tensely for what was coming next.

Rawlins was a dictator whom, one and all, they hesitated to cross. And now he seemed spoiling for a fight with this stranger, whose apparent lack of dismay at the prospect they could only ascribe to utter ignorance.

"So I've heard," they heard the latter saying. "But so far I haven't met one—yet."

"That can soon be fixed," Bear Paw sneered.

"I'd be right smart pleased," Mr. Nutting said.

"Then—enjoy this." Bear Paw struck.

Paragonah Charley sucked in his breath. But he need not have done so. Because Bear Paw's fist merely fanned the air.

Not that his aim was bad, but because his target moved. As Rawlins lashed out, Nutting jerked his head to one side.

And then Nutting's left arm came up and drove his balled knuckles

against the side of Rawlins's jaw, his right arm dug its fist into the triangle below Rawlins's ribs so that Bear Paw doubled over. And then once more his left fist found holding ground under Rawlins's chin, and once more straightened him up.

Bear Paw emitted an involuntary grunt, changed it to a bellow of surprised rage, and rushed.

Mr. Nutting merely stepped aside, thrust out a foot and tripped Bear Paw, who sprawled with his face in the dust.

"By golly—" Swede Anderson began, and paused as Bear Paw scrambled up, tried to go into a clinch, and found his head once more rocked by a staggering punch.

And, seemingly, that punch waked sleeping devils in Rawlins's brain. Untrained in boxing though he was, he could still take punishment. For barely an instant he appeared to hesitate. Then, with another inarticulate cry of fury, he lunged straight at his antagonist, his huge hands no longer seeking to strike, but striving to seize the weapon in Nutting's holster.

"Hi, stranger," Paragonah lifted his voice in warning, "watch yore gun!"

Too late. Bear Paw's clawing fingers closed on the holster and clung. Two blows he took without flinching, while the fingers of his other hand went out—to drag the weapon from its leather sheath and bring it into action.

"Hi, Swede, grab him!" Once more Charley shouted, reaching for Rawlins's arm, just as a long-hooded, low-slung yellow roadster flashed toward the bunk house and came to a skidding stop.

Unnoted by either combatants or spectators, it had come swiftly up the road that skirted the emerald green fields of alfalfa beyond the ranch house, to arrive just as Bear Paw had managed to possess himself of the gun.

Over its wheel a girl of possibly twenty, a girl with red-gold hair and a very self-sufficient and straight little nose, regarded the scene before her out of long-lashed, wide blue eyes.

From beside her the second passenger in the roadster spoke in a tone of grating command:

"Drop thet, Rawlins!"

Paragonah Charley drew back. The other riders shuffled in silence. Bear Paw turned to face the speaker, breathing deeply, his features already beginning to show the marks of conflict still further disfigured by a scowl.

Old Jed Brewster, owner of the Bar-Bee, clambered out of the machine. Of medium height, but heavy-set, his eyes were cold, and the gait of the age-old cowman was in his stride as he approached his foreman.

"Now, jus' what's the idee?" he asked.

"Why, you see, Mr. Brewster, this here party—" Bear Paw essayed an answer.

And his antagonist interposed:

"I'm Richard Nutting, Mr. Brewster, sir."

"Yes, sir," Bear Paw agreed. "That's jus' what I was sayin'. This here nut drove in here a leetle while ago, an' 'lowed es how he'd come fer a job. Me bein' foreman, I asked him fer the partic'lars an' one thing leadin' to another—why—"

"You say your name's Nutting?" the Bar-Bee owner cut further explanation short.

"Yes, sir. And I have a letter for you from your old partner, Lawrence Barr." Mr. Nutting inclined his head.

"Larry Barr!" old Jed exclaimed. Annoyance gave way to pleasure in his face and voice. "Lawsee, boy, why didn't you tell Bear Paw that 'stead of tryin' to bash in his face? Larry an' me started this layout more'n forty year ago, an' anybody he sends out here's welcome. You hear that, Rawlins?"

"Oh, I ain't deaf yet," Bear Paw mumbled.

Old Jed eyed him for a moment. The glances of owner and foreman crossed. "Then I want this to end right here, an'—I ginerally git what I want," Brewster said. "Now, Mr. Nutting, you come up to the house."

"Yes, sir." Dick Nutting flushed. He was practically unmarked by his argument with Rawlins, because, save only during the brief struggle for the gun the latter had not touched him. But during her father's intervention, he had not been unconscious of the somewhat amazed scrutiny of Miss Beryl Brewster's eyes. Then for a fleeting instant, as old Jed ceased speaking, he met them fully, found them filled with a light of unconcealed amusement.

And suddenly, as though that amusement had grown to a point beyond any further effort at restraint, she laughed. So that, without being in any sense unduly self-conscious, Mr. Nutting was forced to the conclusion that her soundless merriment was excited by himself or his clothing or—both. It was not a particularly pleasing thought. Few men relish being laughed at by a woman. And when she happens to be as pretty a woman as Beryl Brewster undeniably was, it but accentuates his natural embarrassment. Consequently, Mr. Nutting's cheeks still wore an unwonted tinge of color as he fell into step at her father's side.

CHAPTER II.

"THE NUT."

ON the Bar-Bee, Miss Brewster was a princess more or less. Indeed, the Coyote Basin in which her father had first established himself with his partner, Larry Barr, some forty years before was a little principality in itself. A splendid range and plenty of water had first attracted old Jed and his partner to it as the scene of their efforts at fortune building when they came West.

From their small beginning had come all the rest. Now the ranch lay secure in its final form, inside the gray and green and yellow ramparts of surrounding hills, marked by a certain air of permanency—a permanency which old Jed dared to hope might outlast his years. The bunk house was of logs, as from the first, and roomy, commodious, stout. The ranch house itself was more modern; two storied, of brick construction, with modern plumbing supplied from the inexhaustible source of icy springs. The corrals, six in number, were of pole design and sound in every sense.

Bear Paw's house, where, as foreman, he lived with his wife, was a later addition. It was built of stone and of one story. The barns also were of stone, as were the other minor outbuildings. Beyond the house along the three-mile road to the main highway, leading to Meeker and Glenwood in one direction and to Grand Junction in the other, stretched alfalfa fields from which was cut the winter hay supply for the stock. Orchard and garden supplied both winter and summer vegetables and fruit and completed the little world which Beryl Brewster knew as home, and which, after the manner of one who had never known another, she loved.

In the days of her father's adventurings with Larry Barr it had been wilderness, secluded, shut off. But now good roads and her car had made it anything else. Over the former she flashed to Meeker, site of the old fort, where the public library was still housed in one of the original log structures of the former settlement.

Or she went on to Glenwood with its atmosphere of modern life, its hotels, its springs and baths, its cosmopolitan crowds. Failing to find in either what variety she craved, she stepped on the trains which ran in either direction and found herself after no more than a trivial journey in Denver or Salt Lake.

But she always came back. Modern of moderns as she was, there was still in her make-up those elements as her father's daughter, which responded to the primitive—the lure of the open spaces—the call of a clear sky—the wind in one's face—the surge and quiver of a speeding mount beneath one, rather than the swifter though less romantic medium of hurtling metal propelled by steam or gas.

Consequently as she watched the progress of her father and Mr. Richard Nutting toward the house, she found herself intrigued as well as amused. Mr. Nutting was certainly an odd looking object in the raiment in which he had elected to arrive. In a measure he reminded her of a movie hero in a picture dealing with the old West.

He must have gathered his habiliments in the period section of some up-to-date costuming house, she imagined, with a quizzical grin still on her red mouth. Yet—on the other hand, he had stood up to Bear Paw Rawlins—had struck him in the face. And Bear Paw had meant to kill him. The thing had still glared in his eyes as she had stopped the car at the scene of battle. And she did not doubt. Wherefore she climbed out of her car and walked to where Mr. Nutting's luggage was piled beside the one-ton truck. And having inspected it to her satisfaction and further amazement, she beckoned Paragonah Charley to her.

"Just who is this world's champion in the trick clothes?" she inquired.

"Reckon you know as much as we do, Miss Beryl," Paragonah grinned. "He's shore a funny *hombre* as to looks. But—I'll tell the world he's a bobcat with his claws."

"Yes." Beryl Brewster nodded. "I noted the fact. Who started the ruckus?"

"Well—Bear Paw struck the fust blow," Paragonah told her.

"And from what I could see while I was driving to get here before the killing, Mr. Nutting struck most of the rest—and how!" Jed Brewster's daughter laughed. Her glance turned to where Bear Paw even then was making his way to his house. "What really happened, Charley?"

Boy and girl looked into one another's eyes. Of all the Bar-Bee waddies, this youngster from southern Utah was Beryl's favorite. Without in the least seeking to disguise the fact, he was her willing and unassuming slave.

"Why," he said after a moment, "I reckon it wasn't nuthin' much, Miss Beryl, except thet Bear Paw didn't seem ter take a shine to this jasper." Briefly, he told her what had occurred. "Of co'se, Bear Paw didn't need to have picked a fight," he said at the finish. "An' maybe he shouldn't have called him a nut—though him sayin' his name was Nutting, an' comin' here in thet tin can, all rigged out the way he is, I dunno as I could say it wasn't natural enough. On'y he shore hadn't oughter throwed his gun in the dirt. An' he didn't need to have tried to hit him, even ef he didn't knuckle under, an'—his tryin' to git his gun right thar at the last shore tuk us all by surprise."

"Can't ride and can't throw a rope and can't use a gun," Miss Brewster checked Mr. Nutting's shortcomings and narrowed her long-lashed lids. "But apparently he plays golf and tennis and the mandolin. And that's a very fine English saddle, Charley."

"Yes'm." Charley nodded. "Ef you say so, I reckon it is. I'd shore hate to ride it myse'f. But lookin' at it thet way, he would seem to be endowed with a few accomplishments. An' I'll tell the world of man he shore kin use his fists."

"I believe you and I imagine Bear Paw will support the statement. But I wouldn't advise you to ask him to do so." Beryl Brewster's red lips quirked.

"Oh"—once more Paragonah grinned—"I ain't aimin' to discuss the Nut with Bear Paw none whatever."

"The Nut, eh? So you've named him?" Miss Brewster laughed.

"Bear Paw named him," Paragonah said. "An' ef your daddy should happen to keep him around here, I reckon the name will stick."

"Well—as to dad's keeping him on, I imagine that's as good as settled," old Jed's daughter declared. "You see, he and Larry Barr were just the same as Damon and Pythias, and anything Mr. Barr could ask him to do, dad would manage if it took a leg. So I think we may assume that—the Nut—will be with us for a time, at least."

"Yes'm," Charley agreed. "I've understood your daddy an' Mistah Barr parted friends before Mistah Barr went back East. But speakin' of the Nut—even ef we do call him thet, we're goin' ter know he ain't yella. He stood up to Bear Paw all right."

"Yellow," Miss Brewster echoed with a speculative intonation. "No, I hardly believe one would call him yellow, Charley. I think I'll go up to the house and pump dad about him. I'm a bit curious, I confess, and Mr. Barr's letter should tell us *who* he is, at least. Put my car away, will you?"

"Yes'm," Paragonah promised. And as Beryl made her way toward the house he climbed into the roadster, kicked the starter and drove the machine into a rock-built garage.

Joe Maddelena grinned as Charley rejoined the still waiting group on the bunk house porch. Paragonah's worship of the lithe blond beauty who queened it at the Bar-Bee was no hidden secret, and Joe followed his grin with words:

"You wanta watch thet mail order waddy, Paragonah. You wanta watch him clost. I been tryin' ter place him ever sence I saw him, an' I've finally sized him up as one of these here sheiks. You know they run strong with the ladies. 'Co'se, ef you was to git you some fancy clothes, or ef you was to go down heah to Glenwood an' larn how ter play go'f—"

"Aw, shet up!" Paragonah told him. A flush crept into his range-tanned cheeks. His eyes turned instinctively in the direction of the ranch house and he added: "Or ef you wanta talk about the Nut, why try it on him? Here he comes."

There was ocular proof of the fact. Mr. Richard Nutting was just emerging from the shadow of the row of box elders which flanked the ranch house, and directing his steps toward the watching group. His progress was unmarked by haste. But equally it was unmarked by any hesitation. Eventually he reached the porch of the bunk house and lowered himself to a seat on its edge.

"Well, gentlemen, it appears that I am to become a member of your happy family for a time at least," he informed them, smiling. "Now, I wonder if one of you would be good enough to show me where I can stow my dunnage, and let me know if there is any spot where I might stable this mechanical masterpiece?"

"You can bunk with me ef you like," Paragonah Charley impulsively invited. "Or you can bunk by yourse'f. We've got six rooms, an' there's on'y seven of us to split 'em, Bear Paw preferrin' to live with his wife. The rest of us hev doubled up, so you can take yore choice. But ef you'd like—"

"Why, I think I would," said Mr. Nutting. "I suspect that I'll need a lot of coaching before I even begin to fit into your way of life. And—I have not made a very good start, so far." A faint smile twitched at his lips and was mirrored in his gray eyes.

"Oh, you ain't done so bad," Swede Anderson told him. "Ef you'd only shuck them clothes, you'd seem almos' human, I suspect."

"An' ef you wouldn't use so much language," Joe Maddelena suggested. "Ef you don't mind my askin', what's the idee of bringin' along a brace of rifles ef you don' know how ter shoot?"

"Oh, that," said Mr. Nutting. "Well, you see, old chap, there's a lot of difference between usin' a rifle and a six-gun. You call 'em six-guns, don't you? And I learned a bit about firearms during the war of course."

"You was in the war?" Paragonah Charley interrupted, a sudden and avid interest lighting his boyish face.

"Oh, yes," Mr. Nutting nodded. "I was completely in it. Got a touch of gas. Now, if we can move in my traps—" He stood up.

"Shore," Paragonah Charley assented, while glances passed between the Bar-Bee riders. "But fust off I reckon you better meet the boys. I'm Paragonah Charley, the fust part of it bein' a sorter advertisement of the Mormon settlement whar I was born. Readin' from left to right, the others is Joe Maddelena, Swede Anderson, Mickey Shawn, Mustang Reilley, Bud Nichols, an' Danny Jones."

"Glad to know the lot of you," Nutting acknowledged the introduction, with a wave of his hand. "I've already more or less introduced myself, I fancy."

"You shore hev," Joe Maddelena nodded. "You've introduced yours'ef plenty to date. But bein' as yore name is sort of difficult ter handle, an' we're all a happy family as you've remarked, an' are usin' what you might call pet names, I reckon we'd better shorten it."

"Why, certainly," Mr. Nutting gave ready assent. "I don't object to nicknames in the least. Back home they always call me Dick. Just what did you have in mind?"

"Well"—Maddelena appeared to consider—"most of our monikers are descriptive, more or less. So I reckon we might as well use the brand Bear Paw run on you right after you-all horned in heah, an' call you—the Nut."

"And why not?" said Mr. Nutting, smiling.

"No reason thet I know of." Maddelena rose. "Say, what in hell's the matter with thet cook?"

"Nothin' at all, Joe," Mustang Reilley snickered as the sound of a triangle beaten in the cookhouse was wafted to their ears. "He's a right good cook, ef you ask me. Come along, Nut, an' see ef he ain't."

"But my dunnage—" Nutting objected.

"Oh, leave it till arter supper. Nobody ain't rustlin' golf clubs around heah, I reckon." Mustang took him by the arm.

"Rustling?" said Mr. Nutting, as he fell into step at his side. "You—er—don't mean to say there's any sort of rustling in this region, really?"

"Oh—don't I?" Mustang rejoined. "Not thet the rustlers air keepin' theirse'ves much in evidence. They ain't. But thar's been a lot o' beef cattle failed ter report to the home corrals the las' few years."

"But—how do they do it?" the Nut inquired somewhat naïvely.

"Say—" Mustang gave him a glance, found his features innocent of any guile, and chuckled. "Do you reckon thet ef we could answer thet question they'd be gettin' away with it?"

"Well, no. It was a silly sort of question, wasn't it?" his companion smiled.

"It was, an' it wasn't," Mustang rejoined. "Or ef it was, it's one what's been asked a number of times before." He waved Nutting through the screen door of the cookhouse and followed him inside.

The Nut gave a good account of himself at the ensuing meal. Yet, even so, he managed to make himself an object of comment from the start. After a vain search for a napkin, he drew a kerchief from a pocket and spread it over his leathern chaps. He broke his bread into bits with meticulous care, instead of biting half moons out of thick and flaky slabs.

"Stick out yer leetle finger, Swede,"

Bud Nichols admonished in an apparent aside, but loudly enough to be heard the length and breadth of the room. "Cain't you see we got comp'ny this evenin'? Ain't you-all never had no instructions in ettyquette?"

"Naw!" Swede protested in a mouth filled mumble. "I'm jus' an ignorant cow waddy what don't know no better than to call food grub. When Bear Paw sends me up to feed the pigs, the on'y way you can tell me from them is by my hat. Wait till my finger bowl's brought in, an' I'll wash my hands in it. Trouble is, they allers sarve them things at the wrong end of a meal."

"By Jove!" the Nut exclaimed, as Anderson paused. "Do you use finger bowls out here, really? I hope you chaps won't take this amiss, but I was under the impression that things were a bit more primitive in the West. I'm afraid I've got rather a lot to learn."

"You have," said Joe Maddelena, smiling thinly. "Quite a lot. Don't let nuthin' surprise you, Nut. Yo're apt to l'arn a lot out heah you'd never have thought of l'arnin' in yore ol' Kentucky home. Satisfyin' yore curiosity consarnin' our usin' finger bowls, however, we don't.

"We washes our hands as well as our fingers, an' sometimes we takes a bath. We're a sort of hard-livin' gang of hombres, an' used ter dirty work. It takes the same sort of man to keep up with us."

"Oh, yes, yes," the Nut accepted, nodding. "I quite realize all that. And I fancied Swede was rotting in raising the subject. That's why I asked. As for work—almost any real work—er—manual labor, I mean, is apt to prove a bit messy, don't you think?"

"Sometimes," Maddelena nodded. "Yeah, Nut—there's been times when I thunk quite a lot. But I've found that ginerally speakin' it pays a man ter keep his thoughts to hisse'f."

"Joe's mentionin' yore old Kentucky home reminds me"—Mustang Reilley broke the silence that followed Maddelena's needlessly antagonistic words—"I reckon you kin play thet thar mandolin you brung along?"

"Oh, yes." The Nut turned to him.

"I'm right fond of music," Mustang declared. "D'ye know 'Sweet Adeline,' or 'There's a Long, Long Trail'?"

"Both of them," the Nut assured him. "I'll show you after dinner if you like."

"Thet would be right nice, I reckon," Mustang accepted, a pleased light waking in the eyes behind his range-squinted lids. He was the oldest of the Bar-Bee riders, with a bronzed, wrinkled neck and a leathern face. "Joe's got a danged good voice," he added.

"I sing a bit myself," said the Nut. "We can have a concert."

"Come along, then." Paragonah shoved back his chair. "Me, I'm a coyote's cousin when it comes to singin'. But I got big ears. We'll stow the Nut's baggage an' then he can turn loose his wolf."

The other riders rose. In the routine of their lives the Nut's promised performance offered a note of interest.

Ten minutes later the pile of dunnage had been transferred to the room he was to share with Paragonah, the truck had been backed under a shed, and they formed a group on the bunk house porch in the gathering dusk. The Nut uncased his mandolin and handed about a package of cigarettes.

"What's these?" Joe Maddelena questioned as the package reached him.

The Nut named a popular brand in his silk, soft voice. "Take a ride in the desert," he invited.

Maddelena tossed back the pack, drew a sack and papers from a pocket in his shirt, spilled a little line of broken leaves on the paper, twisted it deftly into form with the fingers of one hand, and closed the sack by jerking its string with his teeth.

"Mostly I ride a hoss. An' I smoke —tobacco," he said.

"Every man to his taste," the Nut assented as he selected one of the paper rolls, set it alight, and flung the flaming match aside.

"An'—lissen. Don't go to throwin' matches round heah promiscuous," Maddelena admonished.

"Oh, surely. My error." The Nut riffled the strings of his instrument, began playing softly at first and then a little louder. And presently he began singing in a clear, true tenor voice:

"Sweet Adeline—my Adeline,
At night, dear heart—for you I pine—"

Paragonah joined in, Mustang Reilley essayed to do so in a voice that cracked. Joe Maddelena sat smoking his self-made cigarette drawing upon it till its tip faded and glowed like a firefly in the darkness of the mountain night.

"And in my dreams your bright face beams—"

The mandolin rippled, the player's tenor mounted. Maddelena joined the chorus suddenly in perfect key and a mellow barytone that blended the harmony together, carried it toward the climax, and trailed off on the final note. And as he released it and a little silence fell upon the singers, he spoke:

"Nut, I've got you placed at las'. Yo're a troubadour. Jus' a troubadour, I reckon. You know what them jaspers was, I guess. Jus' fellas what traveled about, playin' an' singin' fer folks. Never 'mounted to much, but they served ter amuse people in them days when they was popular, from what I've heard. An—you bein' what you air, it looks to me like you was goin' ter amuse us—a lot."

"No doubt—no doubt," the Nut agreed, and began playing "There's a Long, Long Trail."

In the ranch house Beryl Brewster pricked her ears and turned her head toward her father where he sat with a paper brought back from Meeker that afternoon. Her avowed intention of seeking information concerning Mr. Nutting from him had netted her small result. Beyond the statement that the oddly garbed individual was one whom Larry Barr had sent out to the ranch for the summer, her father had said little. And that was a bit of knowledge which she already possessed.

She was not surprised. Old Jed was a man who, from long habit, followed Joe Maddelena's dictum that a wise man kept his thoughts to himself. Nevertheless, she now spoke in comment as the Nut's perfect tenor rose in the haunting melody of that song which has stirred so many human hearts, which in days past had kept in cadence so many, many weary marching feet.

"Your new waddy seems to have a charming voice."

"Yeah." Old Jed appeared to listen. "Yeah," he repeated after a moment. "Bein' gassed don't seem to hev greatly affected thet."

"Gassed?" Miss Brewster questioned quickly.

"Yep." Her father nodded.

"He—was a soldier, you mean?" Beryl said, responding, as it seemed, to the suggestion of masculine prowess as her sex has always done since the infancy of the race.

"Yep." Brewster once more lifted his paper.

A soldier? Beryl Brewster narrowed her eyes. Back of their lash-fringed, creamy curtains she was seeing mental pictures—of a soldier—of Richard Nutting in the quaint conception of a Western costume in which she had first beheld him that afternoon; of Richard Nutting driving pistonlike blows into Bear Paw Rawlins's face; of Rawlins closing in upon him under the rain of those blows, hands out, reaching for his antagonist's gun. A soldier, a man in a red flannel shirt, leathern chaps, and a ten-gallon hat.

Her lips quirked. And then her expression sobered.

"Still, I don't see why Bear Paw had to try and ride him the minute he saw him," she said as one who thinks aloud.

Her father gave her a glance.

"Bear Paw's been drinkin' a leetle too much of late, I reckon," he remarked.

"Drinking?" his daughter repeated sharply.

"So Emmy says."

Beryl Brewster frowned. Emmy was Bear Paw's wife. She and Sing, the Chinese cook, and Beryl, ran the house. "Why, she hasn't said anything about that to me," she declared.

"Nope," her father assented. "Maybe not. But, seems like this here rustlin' business is gettin' on Bear Paw's narves."

"Oh!" Beryl's red lips circled the word. "Are we losing much stock?"

"A leetle—a leetle," said old Jed. "Trouble is it don't stop. It's jus' a continual leak. Two, three, four, five, six. Hides show up. Allers beefers. No dogies. We've traced them hides from Trinidad ter Gran' Junction an' Moab, as I've tol' you. Maybe we'd find some in China ef we'd go look. Tain't much, but it shore is annoyin'. Natural Bear Paw bein' foreman feels a certain re-sponsibility, I guess. Good man, but sort of jealous of authority maybe. Reckon this here Nutting didn't rub his fur jus' right."

"But—Bear Paw meant to *kill* him, dad," Beryl protested. "He *meant* to kill him. The thing was—in his face. If we hadn't got there when we did—"

"Paragonah an' Swede would 'a' pulled him off," said Brewster. "We didn' exactly save his life. But—I reckon yore right. 'Pears like Bear Paw's intentions was serious. I'll have a talk with him about it. Mos' likely he's regrettin' it right now hisse'f. I've an' idee this boy's provin' so handy with his fists sort of got Bear Paw all het up, an' he sort of lost his head."

Beryl grinned. "The Nut was sure doing his best to knock it off."

"The Nut, eh?" Old Jed's lips twitched. "They put a name on him already?"

"Oh, yes." Beryl nodded. She rose and walked to the window giving a view of the bunk house porch. Tiny points of fire, like red fallen stars, showed in its shadow, the tips of the riders' cigarettes. The tinkle of the mandolin, the sound of blended voices reached her. "Sweet Adeline." They were singing it again. She stood and listened. She could pick out Joe Maddelena's voice and a clear, sweet tenor. She waited until both had died. "Night, dad," she said then, and left the room.

"And—that's all for this evening," Mr. Nutting said as the last note of the chorus quivered into silence. He replaced his mandolin in its case and rose.

"I shorely enjied it. I'm right fond of music," Mustang said.

"Glad you liked it," the Nut accepted. He and Paragonah made their way to their room, and he laid the cased instrument aside, produced a key and unlocked his trunk.

"I fancy I'd better get out some other clothing. My present regalia doesn't appear to be quite true to local color," he remarked.

"Well not — just," Paragonah grinned. "An' say—Nut—you wanta be careful of Maddelena. He's—sort of hard boiled, though I will say he's danged competent."

"Why, I'm not—as yet, eh?" Mr. Nutting straightened and looked the younger man in the face. It was that of a clean-minded boy. "Thanks, Charley," he said. "No doubt I can learn. Perhaps you'd be willing to give me a bit of—coaching?"

"Why, shore!" Paragonah assented quickly. "I'd be right glad to take over yore education in this here cow college, Nut."

"And I'd be right smart pleased to

have you," said Mr. Nutting. "Now, let me show you my traps."

Thus was born a friendship between the newcomer and the youngest of the Bar-Bee riders, which was to endure throughout all subsequent events. It was a friendship born of a mutual liking and a later recognition of those qualities in each, which are highly rated among men. The Nut unpacked his belongings.

"I reckon," Charley finally remarked, "as how thet gas you got durin' the war prob'ly damaged yore lungs. Well, this here climate's right good fer lungers, I understand."

"Yes. So I've heard," Mr. Nutting agreed.

"I didn't git into any of it," Paragonah complained. "I was too young. But—I'd 'a' liked a whirl at it, just the same. Mickey Shawn was in it, too. Sometimes he tells us the dangdest things."

"It wasn't exactly a picnic," Nutting told him. "You don't need to grieve about having missed out. Still, a real man could hardly have kept out and preserved his self-respect. That's the way I felt about it, at least when I volunteered."

"Didn't wait fer the draft, eh?"

"No," the Nut said shortly.

"No, I reckon not." Paragonah narrowed his eyes. "What say I give you a ridin' lesson ter-morrow?"

"Whatever you say, professor," Mr. Nutting agreed.

Paragonah grinned. "Then I reckon you'd better git a leetle rest while you kin. So we'd better hit the hay," he said.

CHAPTER III.

HIS FIRST LESSON.

LIFE at the Bar-Bee was actually a combination of stock raising and farming as the Nut discovered. The cattle grazed on the upland range. But in the lower stretches of the basin vast quantities of hay were produced for winter feeding. And in addition there were the garden which supplied vegetables for both summer and winter in cook house and ranch house kitchens, and a considerable orchard from which fruit was derived.

Bear Paw, as foreman, was in the habit of rotating the duties of his men, assigning them to tasks, which in his estimation demanded attention from day to day, to cultivation, irrigation, or riding range. The old days of vast distances, vast herds having vanished, this on both the Bar-Bee and the smaller ranches of the region, had come to be the accepted thing.

Consequently the riders emerging from the cook house after breakfast the next morning found him awaiting their appearance on the bunk house porch.

"Mornin'," he greeted them briefly. "Shawn, you an' Swede an' Maddelena, git yo' hosses. Jones, you an' Mustang git a leetle water on thet alfalfa. Nichols an' Paragonah kin go up to th' garden an wrastle weeds." He paused, and his glance turned coldly upon the Nut. "An' es fer you—Gawd knows what you kin do," he went on. "Maybe you might go along with Mustang an' Jones. Ef you was to show talent in spreadin' water, we might let you do it steady—"

Joe Maddelena laughed. "What in hell does a man from Kentucky know about water?" he asked.

"Oh, I reckon we could use a fust grade hired man, Joe," Bear Paw suggested. "An' es he cain't ride—"

"Jus' a minute, Bear Paw," Paragonah interposed. "I'd sorter promised him I'd begin teachin' him how ter fork a hoss to-day."

"Yeah?" Rawlins eyed him and let his glance run over the faces of the other men. Those faces showed interest on the instant. "Why, I don't mind," he said slowly. "It won't take long, I reckon, an' Sultan could do with a leetle exercise."

"Aw — say, Rawlins!" Paragonah began.

"Yeah? Say what?" Bear Paw bit him off gruffly.

"Why — why nuthin', I guess," Paragonah stammered. Trouble lurked in the furrow between his eyes.

Dick Nutting marked it, marked also a sudden tenseness in the bearing of the men about him, a sudden light of anticipation in their faces. And as he had said to Paragonah the evening before he was no fool. Fool, indeed, he would have needed to be, however, not to have read this instant change of demeanor as directly attributable to Bear Paw's mention of a horse.

There was a covert grin about Joe Maddelena's lips as he sucked on his cigarette. Swede Anderson's features wore a scowl. He caught Mickey Shawn's eye for a fleeting moment. Well, yesterday Rawlins had tried to drag his gun from its holster in contravention of all accepted tenets of fair fight. And now his choice of the animal to be used in his first riding lesson was one which had apparently startled this group of men — men to say the least inured to anything but softening life.

"All right, then," he heard Rawlins saying. "Sence it looks like you done appinted youse'f Mistah Nutting's ridin' teacher, suppose you git Sultan inter thet corral to the south of the barn. We'll take a half hour off. I reckon thet will be enough."

"I'll get my saddle," said Mr. Nutting, and started toward the bunk house door.

But Bear Paw stayed him. "You'll —what?"

"Get my saddle," the Nut repeated.

Rawlins's thin lips twitched. "Nev' mind. We'll furnish the saddle," he decided.

"Very well, sir." The Nut stepped back. Under Paragonah's coaching he was wearing this morning, his hat, a shirt of khaki color, a pair of trousers, belt and boots. He caught Paragonah's glance. It tried to tell him something, he thought. He hooked his thumbs into his belt and smiled.

"Git thet hoss, Paragonah," Bear Paw admonished. "An', Joe, you git yore saddle."

Paragonah turned away. Maddelena disappeared inside the bunk house door.

Bear Paw stepped off the porch. He moved in the direction of the corral he had designated. The rest of the riders trailed in the same direction. Mickey Shawn ranged himself beside the Nut and spoke in a lowered voice:

"Bear Paw ain't of a forgivin' disposition. But me—I'm a sort of a sentimentalist. I was in the war, too, an' I ain't what you might call squeamish. But—this Sultan's quite a hoss."

"So I fancied." The Nut nodded. "Charley tells me you belong to the Legion. I do myself. Thanks."

"Oh, you're welcome." Mickey grinned. "But watch your step, Buddy. Ef you was to feel thet discretion was safety fust, I reckon none of us would hold it against you—much. You see, mostly we raise our own hosses, and this Sultan's a stallion. I don't reckon he's been rode a half dozen times in his life."

"I see," the Nut accepted mildly. "But—at that rate Bear Paw's permitting me to try and ride him is quite a compliment, isn't it? So—I couldn't refuse to—try, I fancy."

"Well—have it your own way, Buddy. I've told you," Micky surrendered.

"Oh, yes—quite. And I want you to know I appreciate it, really," said the Nut.

Rawlins and the others were finding seats on the top rail of the corral. Nutting and Shawn clambered up. Built of long poles set between double posts to which the rails were fastened by bits of twisted wire, it was a very substantial structure, in keeping with everything else about the ranch. On it the riders roosted, waiting.

Maddelena appeared, carrying saddle and bridle, and flung them over the rail before climbing up.

"An' thar's a—saddle," he remarked.

Mr. Nutting eyed it with head to one side. "Looks more like a cradle to me," he declared.

"Cradle?" Maddelena glanced up from the cigarette he was building. "Well, maybe. But don't you be too shore of it, Nut. Which ain't sayin' many a man ain't been rocked in one of 'em or—ain't fell out. Speakin' of rockin' reminds me of when I was a kid. I was real stuck on a sort of toy they called a rockin' hoss. An' believe muh, I've rid some rockin' hosses sence. But, bein' no Prince o' Wales, I ain't fell off—much. Mos'ly—" He broke off as Paragonah appeared from around the barn with a horse, at sight of which Mr. Nutting sat up a bit more stiffly on the rail.

It was a deep sorrel, with actually creamy mane and tail, pin lined, flaring nostrils, and delicately pricking ears.

"Better you an' Joe go he'p him, Swede," Bear Paw prompted.

Anderson nodded and slid off the rail. Followed by Maddelena, he approached Paragonah and the Sultan.

The latter bared his teeth and reared. Paragonah dug in his heels, flipped a turn of his rope about a post, and so anchored the Sultan to the fence. Joe and Anderson advanced. Ten minutes later the horse stood saddled and bridled, quivering with outraged resentment in body and limb.

"An' now, Mistah Nutting, I reckon you kin take yore ridin' lesson," Bear Paw announced.

"Right-o!" The Nut nodded and dropped down on the inside of the fence.

"Good luck, you danged fool," Mickey Shawn breathed in his ear.

He waved a hand, smiled and walked off across the corral toward the trembling horse and the three men.

Remained Bear Paw, Nichols, Mickey, Mustang, and Danny Jones on the rail. "Caw! Caw!" remarked the latter. "Here we sit like a lot o' crows. What part of the carcass do you choose, brothers?"

"Shet up, Danny," Mustang said in his cracking voice. "I tell you it ain't nuthin' short o' murder, puttin' thet boy up on thet thar hoss."

"You'll tell who?" Bear Paw demanded, fixing him with a glance.

"Anybody what asks me." Mustang stood his ground. "Sultan ain't no ridin' hoss, Bear Paw Rawlins, which I don't hev ter tell you o' co'se."

"Oh, he knows about what he is, I warned him," said Mickey Shawn.

"You did?" Bear Paw turned to him in truculent fashion.

"Yeah." Mickey nodded. "An' while he may be a nut, all right, he ain't one to lay down, as you may hev noticed youse'f. Ef he gits hurt, him bein' a friend of the old man's former partner, I don't reckon either one of 'em's going to be pleased. En—ef he cain't ride—"

"Well, he shore kin top off," Bud Nichols interrupted. "He's on!"

The Nut had reached the quivering horse and his holders. Deftly he had inserted a toe in a stirrup, gathered the reins and swung himself into the saddle at the instant Bud had interrupted Shawn.

One and all the rail birds fell silent, leaning a little forward as they perched.

Yet nothing happened for a space of time in which one might possibly count ten. Sultan stood through it like a figure of red bronze. Save that he still quivered slightly, he made no other movement, gave no sign of the seethe of resentful rage in his equine heart.

Then suddenly his ears went back. And that rage burst from his throat in an actual scream. He rose, up, up, up on his powerful haunches in a rearing, leg lashing lunge, that set him nearly as fully erect as a man, that sagged

the stirrups backward, well-nigh parallel with his spine, so that the Nut lay rather than sat along his back.

"Gawd!" breathed Mickey Shawn. "Ef he goes on over. Hah! Did you see thet?"

Suddenly, as he clung to the rearing horse, the Nut had grabbed at his hat. It came off his head in his hand. It slapped forward against the Sultan's head, directly over his back-laid ears.

The Sultan's forefeet struck the ground. He screamed again in maddened frenzy and hurled himself straight at the farther end of the corral. The Nut flung with him, clinging, swaying in the saddle, seeking as it appeared to replace his hat. Horse and rider flashed past the tense-faced watchers, straight as an arrow toward the post and rail-built fence. And that way, as each of them knew, lay either crippling injury or death, for man or horse or both.

"Aw, hell!" Mustang Reilley squeaked. "Dang it, Bear Paw! Oh, Lawd!"

Sultan had swerved. Faced by the barrier before him, he swung in a swirling, dust-raising turn, began to circle the corral, raced down its further side. And suddenly he swerved again and flung himself crashing broadside against the fence in what appeared a deliberate effort to free himself of his rider at no matter what cost to himself.

It was an old equine outlaw trick which had cost many a rider a broken leg if not his life as well. The watchers held their breath. Sultan had struck the fence in a smother of dust. For a heartbeat it practically veiled both man and horse. Then the latter emerged from it, lunging and striking at the reins which had fallen over his head. His saddle was empty.

"Come on," Danny Jones said grimly, and slid off his perch. "Ef he ain't dead we can run him into Meeker—"

"Well—he ain't dead," Mickey Shawn stayed him, grinning and pointing across the corral, where, minus his hat, but with that exception apparently quite himself, the Nut was regarding his plunging mount from the topmost rail of the fence.

"Well, I'm damned," Danny condensed his utter amazement at the spectacle presented to his wide-eyed vision.

"Dunno," Mickey confessed, as Mustang, Nichols, and he joined Danny on the ground. "Come on an' let's see what he says."

They started across the corral. From its upper end Paragonah, Swede, and Maddelena were advancing on a converging course. So in the end the two groups joined and made one beneath the spot where Mr. Nutting still sat upon the fence.

"I say," he remarked as they neared him, "that's rather a vicious horse. D'ye know I think he had it in mind to crush my leg. He actually threw himself against the fence."

"His object bein' to git you off'n his back," Maddelena told him, smiling. "An' he seems to hev done it."

"Oh, but I say," the man above him protested. "Nothing of the sort. When I saw what he was up to—going into the fence, you know, I could see what was apt to happen, of course. So I took my foot out of the stirrup and threw my leg over the rail when we struck. I skinned it a bit, too, I fancy."

"Well, ridin' a rail like yo're doin' now is a lot easier fer beginners," Maddelena accepted his explanation while the other riders glanced at one another. "Sawhosses, too, ain't so very—rough. Whether you got off or he put you off, don't matter so much, I reckon. The fac' remains thet you *air* off an' you've had yore lesson."

"Oh, but—" the Nut began again, and shifted his position, "I hardly think one would call it that. Be a good chap and catch the brute for me again while I get my hat. I dropped it—somewhere." His eyes searched the corral, and he scrambled from his perch.

"Meanin' you ain't had—enough?" Bear Paw, who had finally joined the others, demanded.

"Oh—absolutely," Mr. Nutting declared. "You see, I rather hate to quit anything I've started. I've always been like that. So, if you'll have the boys catch him and hold him till I can get on again, I'll be much obliged."

"Yo're more liable to be a corpse," Mickey Shawn, who had retrieved the Nut's headgear and now held it toward him, remarked: "Here."

"Oh—hardly that. Thanks." Mr. Nutting took his hat and hung it over a fence post. "Did you notice it come off when Sultan reared, right there at first. I grabbed it, but it hit him over the ears and he started to run. Scared him, I fancy, flapping down over his head like that."

"Oh—my aunt!" Mustang Reilley mouthed as Bear Paw's jaw actually sagged. A slow grin creased his wrinkled cheeks. "I've hearn tell as how the Lord done took care of babies, drunks, an' the United States of Ameriky—an' I reckon it's the proper dope. Nut—don't you-all know thet hittin' 'em between the ears is one way of makin' a hoss decide to use all four feet?"

"Really?" Mr. Nutting turned his head. And suddenly he flashed his teeth. "By jove! Then I did the right thing, eh? Encouraging, to say the least. Well"—he swung back to Bear Paw—"do I ride any more or not?"

For a moment Rawlins did not answer. Merely he regarded the Nut out of grimly steady eyes. "Rope thet hoss, Joe," he directed.

Joe Maddelena smiled. Turning he started for the upper end of the corral where the riata Paragonah had used in leading Sultan into the inclosure, still dangled from a post.

Paragonah dug an elbow into the Nut's ribs. "Say—lissen! Don't play yore luck too hard," he advised in a tense whisper. "Ef you do—"

He broke off. He had met the Nut's eyes, and as on the day before, when Mr. Nutting had picked his gun out of the dust, he found them hard.

"Never mind, professor," he heard the Nut saying softly. "Though it appears my instruction of which you are supposed to be in charge has been designed so that I begin at the end of the course."

"Aw—say, now, Nut," Paragonah began in self-justification. "You heard how this play came up. I—"

"I understand, old man," Mr. Nutting told him. "Hah! He's got him. I'll have to learn to sling a rope."

Sultan again was captive, as he had said. Joe Maddelena had caught him deftly about ears and chin. Now he worked his way toward him along the rope, flicked the latter deftly about his front feet and so left him hobbled, panting and snorting, but powerless to resist.

"Come along Nut—yore cradle's ready," he called.

"Back in the grand stand, gentlemen," the Nut prompted. "You all ride the rails while I have another try at riding this horse." He advanced without hesitation, on Sultan and Maddelena, limping slightly with each step.

"En'—ef he's killed," Mustang croaked as he climbed back with the others upon the fence.

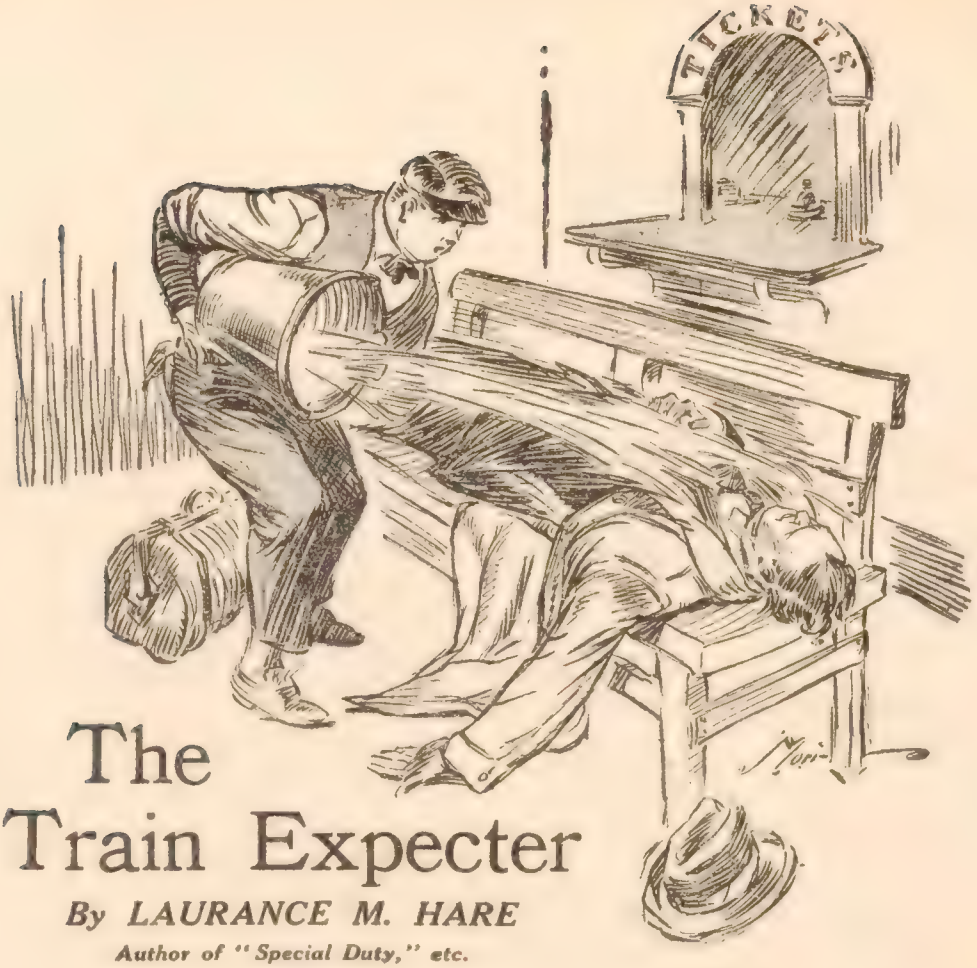
"Oh, dry up," Bear Paw growled. "Ef he is it's his own fault. Nobody asked him to ride. He asked fer it hisse'f."

"He didn't ask fer Sultan," Mustang persisted.

"You'll git yer time without askin' ef you don't snub yore chin," Rawlins advised him gruffly.

Sultan was sidling around and around Maddelena, seeking to evade the Nut. But as Bear Paw spoke the latter closed lithely in upon him, grabbed at a stirrup, caught it, and was up. Maddelena grinned and cast off his rope.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



The Train Expecter

By LAURANCE M. HARE

Author of "Special Duty," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

The station agent in the town where nobody came, and the strange train of events that was started when an invalid drifted in

JOHNNY WEBSTER had just been sent down from the Junction to take the job of station agent at Richville. That was a job! In fact, it was about half a dozen jobs—passenger agent, freight agent, express agent, telegraph operator, train dispatcher and ticket agent—all rolled into one.

Some one with a vivid imagination and unquenchable hope must have named the village, for it never had been rich, and when Johnny went down there it was deader than a halved angleworm and the population were as poor as church mice.

The old optimist who owned the railroad had never been able to sell it to the line with which it connected, and, like the fellow in the famous Irish yarn, he couldn't let go because it was all he could do to hang on. He had built it when Richville, and all the other towns along its right of way, were young and when the region's only industry, lumber, had been in swing.

But the forests had long been exhausted now and only memories remained to remind one of better days.

The railroad was not more than a hundred miles in length. It ran from the International line up into the interior of the Adirondacks and connected with one of the nation's great transportation systems.

Its passenger coaches were of an ancient type with only iron railed platforms at each end, instead of inclosed vestibules of modern cars, and, while they were controlled with modern air-brakes, their interiors were still lighted with kerosene lamps.

The engines that pulled these cars were stubby, awkward looking affairs with four engine truck wheels and four drivers, the rear two directly beneath the cab in place of trailer wheels.

The freight engines were about the size of ordinary switch engines, except that they were equipped with two engine truck wheels, whereas a yard engine had none. It required two of them to pull a train of twenty or thirty cars up over the mountains.

Old Colonel Hacket was hardly breaking even with his antiquated plaything, but he had made something of a pile in the good old days, and he hated like sin to deprive the wilderness villages which he served of their daily transportation.

When Johnny had been at Richville a week he arrived at a conclusion.

"Something," said Johnny, "has got to be done about this."

It may be gathered that Johnny did not like his job. He liked railroading all right, but even with all the multitude of details of his position he could not keep himself busy. And he had to keep busy.

He was a short little man, slight and small boned. But he was plump. His face was round and fat, and it seemed he could never find a pair of trousers the legs of, which were large enough to hide the contours of his thighs.

His movements were more or less spasmodic, though more graceful and concordant than that word implies. When he moved, he moved all over. He was habitually quick both in thought and speech, though his tongue was not what is commonly known as sharp.

He would sit at his desk in the bay window of the ticket office, facing the tracks, with his typewriter and telegraph key before him, and get hot under the collar because he had nothing to do. The telegraph key clicked constantly, but it was very seldom they were calling him.

The train came down out of the mountains in the morning and returned at night, but if any passengers got off or on it was an event. In fact, the mere coming of the train was an event in itself and was attended by a good share of Richville's population.

It was the only occurrence in town—the coming of the train twice a day—except an occasional fire or a fight.

The people of Richville never asked if the train were late. They asked: "How late is it?" And Johnny's unofficial title was the train expecter, which is self-explanatory.

Colonel Hacket practically lived in his private car; his office was on wheels. His sole traveling companions, inasmuch as his wife was dead, were his private secretary and a colored porter who doubled as cook and waiter.

The colonel generally covered his railroad about once a month, stopping one day at every station, not because it took him a whole day to transact his business, but because he could not get out until the next day unless he coupled on to a freight train.

"I wish," he said to Johnny, on his first visit to Richville after Johnny had taken charge at that station, "that we had more of a railroad for you to expend your energies on, young man. Your enterprise merits better things."

He looked about the office, in which the dust of ages had been removed,

and where everything had been cleaned and polished. Records and papers and all the tools of the trade had been put in order and kept there—since Johnny came. Even the stove in the waiting room had been blacked.

"Well, I suppose there's no money in giving so much time to brooms and dust cloths," said Johnny, "but there's not enough else to keep me going, so I might as well keep things cleaned up. I hope you don't think, though, that I've not considered the business end as well."

"No," said the colonel. "I dare say your administration is proving as economical as your predecessor's. Mind, I'm not criticizing old Bowman. He was a good man, Johnny, a good man. But he got in a rut. Don't ever let yourself get in a rut, son—it's bad business."

"No, sir," promised Johnny. "But this railroad's in a rut, too. Isn't there anything we can do to get it out?"

"Hum-m," said the colonel. "I've been thinking, Johnny, I've been thinking, and I've been browsing around for somebody with an attentive ear. The majority of my colleagues seem to be indifferent to their fate. Have you an attentive ear, young man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Please don't 'sir' me," said the old man; "call me colonel. It pleases my vanity. If you have no pressing work for the moment, let us sit and chin."

They sat and chinned.

"So far," said the colonel, "I've managed to keep my head above water, and I'll quit the business before I'll go under. I won't go into debt. Whatever success I have had, son, has been based on that principle—never go into debt. I don't want to quit, but—"

He shrugged his square old shoulders eloquently.

"You know," said Johnny, after a brief silence, "I've done some thinking too, colonel. It's about all I've had to do since I came down here from the Junction. It seems to me that if there were some kind of an industry along the line, it would save us."

"It's quite obvious, Johnny, quite obvious. I've been over the same ground a dozen times—yes, a hundred times." Again he shrugged his shoulders. "But what have we to offer an industry? Cheap labor, to be sure; men around here will work for almost any wages. But that, Johnny, is offset by the remoteness of the region. It would cost too much to transport a product to the centers of population.

"The only thing we have," he continued, "is scenery, and not so much of that as we once had. In any case, tourists are the only people who use a product of that kind, and they don't patronize the railroads."

"We have climate," said Johnny brightly. "These mountains are filled with resorts, both recreational and health. We might at least get something of that sort established here. It would be better than nothing."

"Yes, indeed, my boy, but you are figuring without the advantage of accessibility. The resorts you speak of are easily reached. There is something about getting off a warm and luxurious Pullman in the early morning and waiting at a strange, uninteresting junction point in the bleakness of dawn, and then boarding a drab, antiquated railway coach lighted only with kerosene lamps, that is apt to get one's goat, Johnny, whether one be sick or well. And if that didn't discourage one, the utterly dejected and desolate appearance of any of the towns along our line most certainly would."

"But there ought to be something," Johnny began.

"I agree with you," replied the colonel, "and I admire your courage. Moreover, I shall continue to think thoughts, and it might not be unprofitable in the end if you should do the same.

"If on my next visit I find a slight accumulation of dust on these premises

and perchance a part of your work remains undone, I believe I could forgive you if you had your feet on your desk and a frown on your brow and a really constructive idea ready for my consideration."

He rose to his feet and started for the door.

"I shall retire to my car now, and if any message should come for me, you will find me right out here on your siding until No. 1 comes to my rescue in the morning." Good luck, Johnny."

"Good-by, colonel," said the station agent.

II.

In the days that followed, Johnny didn't neglect either his official duties or his cleaning paraphernalia. Nevertheless, he managed to put a strain on his rather prolific brain.

He was developing, in his thoughts, a project that had obsessed him since the colonel's visit.

From his desk, in the bay window of the ticket office, he could see a mountain peak across the valley in which the village of Richville was located. It was called Spruce Mountain from the fact that it was covered with a dense growth of spruce and fir and other evergreen trees common in that vicinity.

The peak was probably five hundred feet higher than the elevation of the railroad. In winter, ice would form on these trees, and on clear, cold days, more especially when the sun shone, they would glitter with a beauty more rare than jewels because of its transitory quality.

Day after day, Johnny would sit and dream. A thousand times he erected on the mountain top what he already called the Spruce Mountain Sanatorium, a mighty institution for the succoring of the maimed and afflicted.

But his mind traveled in circles, and each time he arrived at the same disheartening obstacle—the inaccessibility of the town, or any town, for that matter, on the line. They possessed climate and scenery, but these were shared with other mountain villages with the added advantage of location.

A passenger arrived from the junction one morning on Number One. It caused more of a stir than the ordinary arrival of a passenger, because he was a stranger. He had never been seen before in Richville.

More than that, his bearing indicated affluence and there emanated from him a spirit of unrest which seemed to be transmitted to the general atmosphere. Johnny, who was busy unloading some express and baggage, hardly noticed the man at first, except to see that he carried an expensive Gladstone bag, the companion piece, no doubt, of the magnificent trunk Johnny had just taken from the baggage car.

The stranger wore a heavy ulster. The season was autumn when the air is chill and the varicolored foliage of the trees is perhaps more beautiful than at any other time.

When Johnny came into the office a few minutes later, the stranger was waiting for him on the customer's side of the ticket window. Johnny had not had a good look at him before and his features were startling.

He was terribly emaciated and his clothes were much too large for him. His complexion was sallow. His sunken eyes were desperate and grievous and his voice was whining.

"Are you in charge here?" he asked of Johnny.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, when," inquired the stranger, "is the next train out of this God-forsaken hole?"

"Which way do you want to go?" Johnny asked.

"Any way," the man exploded, "just so I get out of here on the next train."

"That," said Johnny, "is eight o'clock to-night—if it isn't late. It will take you back to the Junction where you came from."

"Oh, Lord!" cried the man. He seemed suddenly to wilt.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" Johnny's tone was solicitous. "Your trunk is here, at least, I suppose it's yours."

"Oh, damn the trunk!"

"Did you expect some one to meet you?"

"No! I've never been in this dump before and I don't know anybody here, and what's more, I don't want to."

"Then why," asked Johnny, in sheer curiosity, "did you come?"

But his curiosity remained unsatisfied. While he talked, the man's eyes closed, his grip on the edge of the counter relaxed and he slipped quietly to the floor.

Johnny rushed into the waiting room. The stranger had fainted.

Johnny had stretched him out on his back and opened a door to let in some air. He then got a bucket of cold water and dashed it in the man's face.

When he came to, Johnny carried him to one of the benches near the door. He was mad because his clothes were wet, but Johnny let him rave and telephoned for old Dr. Sprague.

The doctor came over immediately and took the prostrate man's pulse and temperature. He looked him over quizzically, then shook his head.

"Who is it, Johnny?" he asked.

It may be mentioned here that in a small town, the formalities of address are dropped at the earliest possible moment. Last names are forgotten after the first meeting and it's Johnny or doc, as though they had known each other always.

"I don't know," said Johnny. "He came in from the Junction just now. He's got a trunk out in the baggage room almost as big as a box car. He was asking me about the next train out of town when he fainted."

"There was nobody with him?" the doctor inquired.

"He was all alone. Doesn't even know anybody here in town."

"He's certainly got no business here, Johnny. Hospital's the place for him."

"It is not!" the stranger cried passionately. He struggled to a sitting position. "You just try taking me to a hospital. You'll never get me there alive."

"Take it easy," said Dr. Sprague. "We won't take you to the hospital. You rest awhile and then tell us what the trouble is."

"Take him over to my room at the hotel," Johnny suggested. "It's the nearest place I know of."

"Think you can walk a little way?" the doctor inquired.

The stranger opened his mouth to speak and one judged that he was about to make an objection. But again he gave the impression of wilting and he nodded his head feebly.

Johny supported him on one side and Dr. Sprague on the other, and together they walked to the Richville Hotel, which, in reality, was a glorified boarding house. Johnny paid fifteen dollars a week there for his board and room.

They managed to get the patient up the stairs and arranged him on Johnny's bed. There was a terrified look on his face as his rescuers started to leave.

"You better snatch a little sleep," Johnny advised. "I'll be over to see you at noon and if you want anything, just call down the stairs and I'll come over if you need me."

He left the door open as he went out.

The doctor was there at noon when Johnny returned. The patient had just finished a glass of orange juice and some broth.

"I wish," he said pointedly to the old man, "that you'd get out of here. It isn't that I dislike you personally, but I hate doctors and I don't want you around."

The doctor left immediately, winking at Johnny as he passed.

"I guess you hurt the old fellow's feelings," said Johnny when the doctor had gone.

"I couldn't get rid of him any other way," replied the stranger. "I hate those birds. They're always trying to send a fellow off to a hospital. I—I guess I let myself in for more than I figured on when I started up here."

"Well, what did you think you were letting yourself in for?" Johnny inquired. "What's your idea in being here at all? I can't figure it out."

"It must seem strange," said the man. "I hardly know myself why I ever came to such a dump as this. I must be more or less crazy, I guess. Everybody else thinks so and maybe I am. But, you know, I don't mind it so much as I did this morning. You've been so darned white that I feel I've got one friend anyway. I'd like to know your name. Mine's Allister, Gordon Allister."

"Most folks call me Johnny," said the station agent. "My last name's Webster."

"Well, listen," said Allister, "don't let that old saw-bones take me to any hospital, will you? He can't do anything for me and neither can a hospital. There's nothing the matter with me except that I've nothing to live for."

"Oh, snap out of it," exclaimed Johnny impatiently. "Whoever heard of not having anything to live for? That's the bunk," he added bluntly.

"It is not," Allister denied. "You don't know anything about it or you wouldn't say that."

"No, but I'd like to," Johnny suggested quickly.

Allister scrutinized him for a moment in silence.

"I'm water-tight," Johnny assured him, "if that's what you're afraid of."

Allister shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the difference?" he decided. "Might's well spill it if you care to listen. In the first place, I was born poor and I didn't like it. Then I married what turned out to be a gold digger. Kept me to the wall all the time.

"Finally I invented something and made a pile. It went to Jane's head. After I'd developed the business, she insisted that I sell out and go globe trotting. She liked that all right, but she got tired of me. She got a divorce and stuck me for fifteen thousand a year alimony.

"Oh, I've got plenty of money," he went on, answering the question in Johnny's eyes. "My income is sufficient to keep a harem if I wanted to. But that's all I have got—no home, nobody to care whether I come or go, no business, nothing."

"But all this doesn't account for your illness. And you are ill, aren't you?"

"I should say all that was enough to make anybody ill," Allister answered. "I've been to doctors all over the world, but none of them has been able to give it a name. My stomach's all shot and I can't even eat anything. The saw-bones say they can't do anything for that until I get over the dumps.

"I came up to this neck of the woods to try to forget. I had no particular reason in choosing this place. It looked remote enough on the map, so I decided on it and bought a ticket. It pretty nearly floored me this morning, but I guess maybe I can stand it until I cash in."

"You *are* in bad shape," Johnny decided. "Gosh, it's a shame for a man as young as you are to be in this condition. Snap out of it. You'll find this is a pretty decent sort of burg when you get acquainted."

He thought for a moment, then ventured a suggestion. "I'll tell you what: They've got a big front room here with two beds in it. We can bunk together if you want to. It 'll be a little cheaper for me and you'll have some company."

"Suits me," said Allister.

"Good!" cried Johnny. "I've got to beat it now and snatch some lunch before I go back to work—I mean back to the office. There isn't much work

to do. I'll bring your trunk over this afternoon. See you at five o'clock."

III.

JOHNNY was in his element. He suddenly found himself with two weighty problems to think about, and planning their solutions was the next best thing to physical activity.

Once more he sat at his desk and erected, in his mind, the Spruce Mountain Sanatorium. The institution's first patient would be Gordon Allister. The magnificent view from the mountain top would be a sufficient tonic for the most disillusioned creature.

But once more he came up against the same old barrier. Who would furnish the money for this enterprise and, granting that it would ever become an accomplished reality, how was the problem of adequate transportation facilities to be solved?

He was no nearer the answers to those questions when Colonel Hacket returned from the other end of the line. The colonel arrived on Number Two one night, but did not come to see Johnny until the next morning.

He found the young man engrossed in thought. A considerable amount of dust had been allowed to accumulate during his absence and papers of various kinds were to be found where they did not belong, all due to the absent-mindedness of the self-appointed station porter.

"Judging from appearances," the colonel commented, "I would say that you have already obviated our difficulties. I am all ears this morning, my boy," and he eased himself into a chair.

"I'm afraid I haven't anything very valuable to offer," said Johnny. "I've done a lot of thinking, but the best I have been able to do is enlarge on the subject of health resorts. That mountain top up there"—he pointed out the window—"would be an ideal place for a sanatorium. The only difficulty, colonel, is money."

"A very tangible difficulty," agreed the colonel. "Anybody can be a vicarious millionaire. One good dollar in the hand, Johnny, is worth two in the head."

"Well, I've been thinking," said Johnny, "why it wouldn't be worth your while, colonel, to finance a project of that sort and then improve your passenger service to meet the demands of invalid passengers."

"Because," answered the colonel, "I lack the one essential element to carry out that suggestion. It takes all I can rake together to keep this old road navigating. In the second place, I'm a railroad man, pure and simple. The only way to succeed in this world, Johnny, is to go in for one thing and stick to it.

"There is only one thing I could do," he went on. "In the event of a resort of any kind being erected here, I would promise better equipment and better service if the prospects of my revenue being increased were promising. I have negotiated with a good many enterprises on that basis, young man, but nothing has ever come of it. The situation is discouraging to an old duffer like me."

They were silent for a moment.

"At any rate," Johnny broke out presently, "your promise obviates one thing that has been bothering me. The only question now is one of money. Speaking of money, colonel, I've had a peculiar experience since you were here before."

He told of the arrival in town of Gordon Allister, and gave a brief résumé of the man's ailments.

"Did you say Gordon Allister?" the colonel asked.

"Yes."

"And you've never heard of him?"

"All I know about him is what he has told me himself. I guess he made quite some money with an invention of some kind."

"I guess he did," the colonel agreed. "He invented one of the first electric

washing machines on the market and made a killing with it. I read of his divorce a year or so ago. He's filthy with money. Why don't you get him interested in your scheme?"

"Because it is impossible to interest him in anything. He sold his business and then his wife divorced him, and he has no interests left. It has nearly floored him. He's pretty well gone in the head."

"Well," said the colonel with finality, "whatever's to be done must be done soon. This old railroad is on its last legs and they're wabbly. I'm willing to die broke, my boy, but I won't die in debt. I hope you have some encouragement for me next time."

IV.

As has been said before, the town of Richville was dead. There was no work in the village and very little anywhere on the line.

The only thing that kept the population together was the fact that a good many people had long ago invested their money in homes and business properties, and they could not sell. They did the next best thing, and insured these properties to the limit the insurance companies would accept. At frequent intervals there would be a fire and at least one building would burn to the ground.

There was a peculiar singularity about all these fires that could not be ascribed to any coincidence. Almost invariably they started in the middle of the night when everybody was in bed, and they were of unknown origin. The insurance companies conducted rigid investigations, but nothing was ever proved. Slowly but surely the town was burning up.

The only fire protection in the village was a siren that made a lot of noise and an inadequate little hose cart of no value whatever because there were no hydrants, and a more than useless voluntary fire company because the members were almost always working out of town.

As a matter of fact it is doubtful, under the circumstances, if the population wanted any fire protection. This was the state of affairs when the hotel burned.

Johnny had been racking his brain for some method of stimulating Allister's interest in life, more specifically in the nebulous Spruce Mountain Sanatorium, when that destructive monster, fire, gave him a boost.

Shortly after midnight several days after his latest conference with the colonel there was a loud and insistent knocking on the door of the room he shared with Allister.

"What is it?" he called.

"You fellows better get your clothes on," called the proprietor. "The hotel is on fire."

Allister bounded out of bed as if he had been shot. Johnny was afraid the excitement would be too much for him, but he behaved magnificently. They could smell the smoke as soon as they were awake, and the siren began howling almost immediately.

"I won't try to bother with that trunk of mine," said Allister. "We'll just throw a few things into our bags and make a dash for it. Take a look and see if we can get down the stairs, Johnny. Maybe we'll have to jump."

The fire had started in the rear of the house, and had not yet reached the front, although the wind was blowing in that direction. Johnny could see nothing when he looked but smoke.

"Guess we can make the stairs, Gordon, if we hurry," he decided.

They threw their clothes on any old way, and with a few necessities in their handbags and some other things on their arms, which they snatched up on their way out, they made for the open.

The wind had reached a terrific velocity. Autumn was over, the trees were bare, and the wind proved to be the forerunner of the first snow of the winter.

The best that could be done by way of fighting the blaze was the formation of a bucket brigade, which attempted to protect the buildings about the hotel. A long line of men was required for this because the river, where they got the water, was nearly a block distant.

With their possessions stored a safe distance away, Johnny and Allister assisted in this work. Allister fell in with all the enthusiasm of a small boy playing some new sort of game.

Johnny noticed this, but ascribed it to a form of hysteria and feared for his companion. But when it was all over, after two hours of battling with wind and flames, and nothing remained of the hotel but smoldering embers, Allister stood back and surveyed the ruins.

"You know," he said to Johnny, "I suppose I shouldn't feel as I do, but that was the most fun I've had in an age. A fellow gets a kick out of battling such irrepressible forces as fire and flood, wind and snow. I believe I'd kind of like to rough it, Johnny, out in the wilds."

"Well, it's wild enough here," Johnny remarked. "Life in this country is a matter of the survival of the fittest in its most elemental form. It's a fight all the way."

They took their things and spent the remainder of the night at the depot. Before daylight arrived Johnny did a lot of cogitating about what Allister had said, and an idea suddenly occurred to him out of a clear sky. Or, rather, it seemed he had glimpsed the sun through what had seemed a mass of impenetrable clouds.

On the top of Spruce Mountain, on the very site where he hoped some day to build the Spruce Mountain Sanatorium, was an old, deserted cabin. He had run across it on one of the Sunday jaunts he was in the habit of taking.

It commanded an unobstructed view for miles in every direction. If he could only get Allister to live up there, he might possibly be able to stimulate the man's interest to the point where he would at least listen sympathetically to Johnny's scheme.

"Do you still want to rough it?" the station agent asked just as the sun crept up over the mountains.

"Of course I do," Allister answered. "I've never lived like this before. I have never realized what I was missing. Even when poor, I lived in a flat right in the middle of a town equipped with all modern conveniences. This is great!"

"Do you see that mountain peak over there?"

Johnny pointed to the top of Spruce Mountain.

"Yes."

"Would you like to live up there?"

"Could we?" Allister asked in surprise.

"There's an old deserted cabin up there," Johnny told him. "Nobody has lived there for a number of years, but it could be fixed up."

"Oh, who owns it?" Allister wanted to know.

"Oh, some farmer around there. But I don't believe you could buy it without buying the whole tract too. Besides, I haven't enough money to pay my share. Maybe we'd better rent it."

Allister shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the difference? I have no other use for my money. It wouldn't cost such a terrible lot even if we had to buy the whole mountain. You need not worry about your share; I couldn't live up there alone, and I want you for my guest."

"Are you sure you'll like it?" Johnny insisted. "We'll have to get up before daylight and build a fire in a cold stove with wood we've chopped ourselves. The only light we'll have will be kerosene lamps. We'll have to carry water from a pump, and we'll have to thaw it out first at that. There isn't even a bathroom."

"The sooner the better," was Allister's reply. "I'd like to go to-day if we could."

"We can't do that," Johnny objected. "You'll have to make your arrangements with the owner, and then we'll have to fix the place up. Chances are the roof leaks and the inside will probably have to be repaired some. And then we'll have to get a stove and some furniture. Guess we better find a place to board for a week or two. You can do that this afternoon."

"I'll do it now," said Allister, "and lug our things over and get some breakfast. Then after lunch I'll find out who owns that shack and put the deal through."

"Don't try to do too much at once," Johnny advised. "You better catch up on your sleep to-day and not go up the mountain until I can go with you. It's a pretty stiff climb."

"Don't you worry about me, Johnny. I had no intention of walking. I'll hire somebody to drive me up."

V.

After about two weeks Johnny and Allister were established in their own residence. The latter had bought the whole tract on which the cabin stood—a hundred acres covering most of the mountain—for ten thousand dollars.

The cabin had been patched up, broken windows replaced, and the chimney repaired until it was in fairly livable shape. Inside, it had originally been one room about twenty feet square. But at some time or other this had been divided in the middle and the rear part partitioned off to make a fair-sized bedroom and a very small kitchen.

There had been a wooden bunk over the space reserved for a cook stove in the kitchen. But the new occupants had torn it out, and in its stead they had furnished the bedroom with two small iron beds which they had bought in the village, together with a few other pieces of furniture.

The kitchen floor was left bare, but in the bedroom and living room the floors had been covered with cheap linoleum.

The cabin faced the village half a mile away. It stood on about a half acre of cleared ground. At the rear was a shed which had evidently been used for a barn.

The two hermits cleaned it thoroughly and whitewashed the interior. Then they installed therein a cow and a horse.

The cow's function was obvious, and the horse, together with an old cutter, inasmuch as the snow had been falling steadily for a week or more, had been bought to lessen Allister's sense of remoteness while Johnny was at the station, and to enable him to get about when he tired of the cabin.

At first, Johnny did all the heavy work, such as caring for the animals, chopping wood and carrying water, while Allister managed most of the cooking and housework. But gradually, under an intelligently regulated diet, plenty of fresh, clean milk, pure water, and enough work to keep his mind occupied and to make him ready to sleep soundly at night, his emaciation disappeared and the pallor of his skin was displaced by a healthy glow.

The improvement was almost imperceptible at first, nevertheless it was an improvement, except that in his leisure moments the man was despondent and moody. But as winter struck its stride Allister grew stronger until he was able to do his share of all the work.

Johnny noted all this with satisfaction and bided his time to broach the subject that was uppermost in his mind.

His first real anxiety, after Allister had begun to convalesce, came when they were sitting before the little stove one night about two months after they had come to live in the cabin.

"I don't know," said Allister, "why I ever did anything so foolish as to tie myself down with this place. I'm sick of it."

He did not look like the same man who had arrived in Richville on No. 1 that morning and fainted in the station. Not only had he gained in weight and appearance, but off up in the woods he did not shave regularly, and at Johnny's suggestion he had bought a new outfit of clothes more appropriate to his new mode of life.

He wore a dark woolen shirt, coarse heavy trousers that buttoned tight about his legs below the knees, and high leather boots. It gave him a more rugged appearance than more refined apparel could have imparted.

"But I thought you liked roughing it," Johnny reminded him.

Allister shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, it was all right at first. It was different than anything I had ever experienced, and it was rather fun. But there's no novelty to it any more—just the same old routine, morning, noon and night."

"How would you like to hang around down at the station with me? It would be something of a diversion and maybe I could teach you what little I know about railroading."

"I'd like it," said Allister. "I can understand now the drudgery of housewives in being tied down inside four walls twenty-four hours a day. It's no fun, I'll tell you."

"But you're not tied down," Johnny objected. "It only takes a fraction of your time to do the work around here, and you've got the horse to take you anywhere you want to go, any time."

"You don't get the idea," said Allister. "It's no fun gallivanting around just because you don't want to stand still. People don't generally do things without a reason. If they haven't a logical reason for doing a thing they generally delude themselves into thinking they have. But I've got no earthly reason for even living.

"You know, Johnny, a fellow likes to think he's necessary to some one or something. If it isn't a wife and family, he at least wants to believe that he's indispensable to whatever else he is most interested in. I'm interested in nothing, and nobody needs me."

Johnny was almost as despondent as his companion. He felt he had lost all the ground he had gained. He concluded that the psychological time had come to feel Allister out concerning the Spruce Mountain Sanatorium and give the man something to think about.

Thereafter their work at the cabin was divided equally, and before they left in the mornings they would pack for themselves a lunch to be eaten at noon, and would drive down to the village in the cutter.

Allister exhibited an intelligent interest in the routine of the office and showed considerable business sense in various questions he asked concerning the operation of the road. He even learned to send and receive messages by telegraph, under Johnny's guidance.

Because of this slight enthusiasm of Allister's, Johnny opened up the discussion of his pet ambition by talking about the condition of the road.

Sitting comfortably in the office, they would argue. No matter what ideas Johnny advanced, Allister would oppose them.

It might have appeared to a casual observer that he was merely contrary. But as a matter of fact Johnny was a little prejudiced because of his local interest, whereas Allister pointed out his fallacies with logical and impartial observations.

Gradually the subject of their arguments broadened until they were discussing the entire region. Whether or not Johnny ever admitted the good judgment of Allister's contentions, he at least realized that they were keeping the man's mind off his troubles.

Johnny finally got down to brass tacks.

"The only thing," he said, "that will save this railroad is some kind of an institution that will bring in money from the outside and give employment

to at least a portion of the population. And the spot where your cabin stands is an ideal place for a sanatorium."

Allister was running true to form. He made a disagreeable face.

"I'm not interested in this railroad," he said, "and I wouldn't own a sanatorium for any money."

"What the devil are you interested in?" Johnny demanded, half jestingly. "I've heard that the way to live a long time is to get a serious illness and nurse it. I guess that's what you're doing. You talk about not being necessary to anybody or anything, Gordon, when you have the means not only of helping people who are in the same boat you're in, but of being the salvation of this neck of the woods."

"That's all right, but who's going to thank me for it?"

Johnny looked at Allister quizzically.

"Isn't the satisfaction of accomplishment sufficient thanks?" he demanded. "Have you got to have your ego inflated all the time by some woman, for instance, whose only motive is to spend your money?"

"Oh, shut up," said Allister. "This neck of the woods, as you call it, isn't worth saving, and I'm not interested, and that's all there is to it. And granting that I did build a sanatorium or anything else on Spruce Mountain, who would come to it? And granting that anybody did come, who would stay?"

"I notice you came," said Johnny, "even when there wasn't a sanatorium. Not only that, but you have stayed, and you have regained your health, partially. If it wasn't for that pumpkin on your shoulders that you call a head, you'd be all well."

"You can bet your neck that I wouldn't have come if there had been a sanatorium here," Allister replied. "If I'd wanted to go to a sanatorium, I could have gone to any one of a dozen that are widely known and not tucked off in a God-forsaken hole like this."

"And that's the very reason," Johnny triumphed, "that you didn't go—because they are widely known and not tucked off in some out-of-the-way place. To be frank, Gordon, you wanted to get off the beaten track, didn't you, where it was wild and primitive, and not follow the crowds?"

"Why, I suppose I did," Allister admitted.

"All right," said Johnny. "There are thousands of sick people who feel the same way about it. Not only that, Gordon, but they are people who can afford to pay the price of exclusiveness. Oh, I've thought this thing out in every detail. I'd build a place for the best class of people, and both the financial and social standing of every patient would be rigidly investigated before being admitted."

"That doesn't sound much like a gift to humanity to me," Allister commented.

"It isn't," said Johnny. "That is, not humanity in general, only a certain class of humanity. There's too much at stake for it to be otherwise. We've got to build something that will be an assured success from the start. Can't afford to take chances up here."

"Well, I, for one, am not going to take chances," declared Allister. "Furthermore, there isn't anything at stake, so far as I'm concerned, and there isn't going to be, and that's flat."

VI.

THE only effect the foregoing had on Allister was to make him more moody and more despondent than ever. He gradually ceased even arguing with Johnny about other matters. He spent less and less time at the station, and neither did he spend his time at the cabin.

He took to tramping about by himself in the woods. Johnny never questioned him about these jaunts, and Allister never offered any explanation. The station agent could only hope that

perhaps he had planted a germ of enthusiasm in Allister's mind and that it was growing in secret.

He had only this assumption on which to base his hopes during Colonel Hacket's next visit. But the colonel's attitude had changed. Where he had once seemed to count on Johnny's being able to concoct a really practicable idea, he was now entirely indifferent to his employee's efforts.

"I guess," he said, "that you'd better have another position lined up about next fall, young man."

"But can't you hang on a little while longer, colonel? Business will pick up a little during the spring and summer."

"A little, yes," said the colonel, "but not enough to carry me through another winter."

"I'm sure Allister has something up his sleeve," Johnny insisted. "If you could only wait until we put it through—"

The colonel shook his white head.

"The only thing you have put through so far," he replied laughingly, "is a vast quantity of highly imaginary financing. No," he went on. "I hope, my boy, that your next position will be one where your chances of advancement are greater. The best I can do will be to recommend you highly to any prospective employer."

As Allister's silence continued, Johnny had an almost irresistible desire to ask him flatly what he was doing and thinking about. But inasmuch as it was probably too late to do anything about the Spruce Mountain Sanatorium, even if Allister were inclined in that direction, Johnny held his peace and his tongue.

Then something happened that put the finishing touch on everything. Allister disappeared—utterly and absolutely.

He remained at the cabin one morning when Johnny left for the station. When Johnny returned that night, he was gone.

Johnny thought at first that he had wandered off into the woods and got lost, but after searching the premises the station agent decided otherwise.

Not only were all of Allister's personal things gone too, but the horse and cutter as well. Not even a note had been left.

Johnny knew, of course, that Allister's flight had been premeditated; nevertheless, the possibility still remained that the man might have got lost in the unfamiliar countryside. Johnny made numerous inquiries of the neighbors without result, and that evening he went back to the station and telegraphed or telephoned all the towns within a radius of twenty-five miles.

Failing to get any news from that source, he made an all night search, with the aid of a hired rig, of all the roads leading out of Richville.

He went to work in the morning, tired and considerably apprehensive because he could not tell what insane inspiration might have taken hold of Allister. The circumstances were complicated rather than clarified when a strange man drove up to the station about noon with the horse and cutter.

"Where'd you find it?" Johnny demanded.

"Feller drove into town last night, jest before train time," the stranger explained. "He give me ten dollars to keep the horse overnight an' fetch her back here to you to-day."

"What town do you come from?" Johnny inquired.

"Mecca."

Mecca was one of the towns on Colonel Hacket's railroad about thirty miles from Richville, in the direction of the Junction.

"Is the man who gave you the money still in town?"

"No. Reckon he left on the night train."

When No. 2 came up from the International line the next night Johnny called to the conductor.

"Say, Tom," he asked, "do you re-

member the fellow that's been hanging around the station here for the last month or so? Kind of tall and slim?"

"Yeah."

"Did he get on the train at Mecca night before last?

"Yeah."

"Did he have a ticket?"

"No. He paid his fare as far as the Junction. Why?"

Railroad men are a curious bunch because they like to gossip. Gossip is as essential to their happiness as it is to the proper conduct of a ladies' aid society.

"Why, he lit out of here in the morning day before yesterday," Johnny explained, "without saying a word to anybody. He drove in a cutter as far as Mecca and hired a man to bring the rig back yesterday morning. He's been sick, you know, and I thought maybe he'd gone off his head."

"The hell!" the conductor sympathized. "I asked him where he was goin', just to pass the time o' day, you know, an' he said he had some business to tend to. Not another word."

As soon as the train had departed, Johnny went back to his office and telephoned the Junction. He got in communication with the man whom he had worked under before coming down to Richville. He described Allister, and asked if they had seen him there.

"Why, a fellow of that description," said Johnny's late boss, "came in on No. 2 night before last and bought a ticket for Utica."

"Thanks," said Johnny, and hung up the receiver.

He knew that information was of no value, because if Allister were really running away—and everything pointed to that conclusion—he could have purchased another ticket at Utica for his real destination.

VII.

JOHNNY was tasting the first real disillusionment of his life, and he took it hard. As the days slipped by with no word from Allister, and no encouragement from the colonel, he began to appreciate, to a slight degree, the seriousness of Allister's condition when his late companion had first come to Richville.

It seemed that everything he touched or tried to do was jinxed. He wondered if this would continue to be so for the remainder of his life.

During the remainder of that bitter winter, a seemingly endless one, he sat alone in his office listening to the tick of the telegraph that was not calling him, watching the trains go by when they came, waiting for them when they did not.

After all his dreaming and planning and scheming, he was still only the train expecter at Richville, and that, apparently, not for long.

But hope springs eternal in the breast of man, especially a young man, and spring was in the air long before the temperature rose and the snows dissipated and flooded the streams. Who has not felt the spirit of renewed, unsullied energy within oneself when the calendar indicates that the furies of winter are exhausted and the freedom of spring is not far off? It was about the middle of March when Johnny had his brilliant inspiration.

He was sitting at his desk one day, rhythmically repeating over and over a phrase he had run across in something he had read. Idly he jotted it down on paper and embellished it by retracing the words with his pencil again and again:

"United we stand, divided we fall."

Johnny looked at the words for a long time, and his mind wandered.

"Hum-m," he said to himself, "United we stand, divided we fall."

For the remainder of that week an observer might have noted that Johnny's expression was peculiarly intent. His inspiration was taking form.

On the following Monday, at noon, he trudged up the main street of the village to the office of the little weekly

newspaper that was published there, and spent the entire hour talking with the proprietor. He talked hard.

When he came out his face was flushed with excitement, but there was also a satisfied expression on it. The afternoon he spent in typing two letters, long letters, replicas in effect of his conversation with the newspaper proprietor. He mailed these to two other newspapers in the county.

It may be explained here that, geographically, Pelo County bore a close resemblance to a strip of ribbon. It was hardly fifteen miles across at the widest part, but its length embraced most of the Pelo County Railroad's mileage. It was on this fact that Johnny's plan was based.

The next day he received from the printing office fifty copies of a placard about two feet by eighteen inches in size and printed on white cardboard.

Across the top, in capitals, were the words:

UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL

Most of the card was occupied by an immense black question mark, and at the bottom was the following information:

> The Pelo County Railroad Company will transport, gratis, every merchant, business man and farmer in the county who wishes to attend a meeting in the town hall at Richville on Tuesday, April 3, at 8 P.M., to discuss the organization of the Pelo County Coöperative Association.
>
> Colonel Charles Hacket, president of the Pelo County Railroad Company, will be one of the chief speakers.
>
> All those expecting to attend, please communicate with the undersigned at Richville at the earliest possible moment, so that adequate lodging arrangements may be made, inasmuch as there is now no hotel in the village. Remember,
>
> "United we stand, divided we fall."
>
> (Signed)
>
> JOHN JAMES WEBSTER.

When the night train came in, Johnny took the placards out to the conductor.

"Stick one of these up in each end of the coaches, will you, Tom?" he asked. "And throw the rest of them off at the stations along the line."

The conductor read the advertisement through.

"What's the old man up to now?" he asked.

Johnny grinned.

"Not half what he's going to be up to the first time he reads one of these things," was his reply.

"You mean to say he didn't do this?"

Johnny nodded his head.

"What the hell?" the conductor inquired.

"Never mind, and don't ask questions," Johnny advised.

"But I don't wanta lose my job, hangin' these things all over the place," the conductor protested.

"Well, you'll lose it if you don't, so do as I say and I'll take all the responsibility."

The conductor shrugged his shoulders and boarded his train as it started moving.

In a few days another consignment of placards came down from the printing office—about five hundred of them. Johnny mailed these, at his own expense, to all the shops in all the towns in the county, to be displayed in show windows.

And the next editions of the three county newspapers carried a full page spread of the advertisement. Not only that, but they had all asked Johnny for information and gave the undertaking plenty of space in their news columns.

Colonel Hacket heard about it very shortly. He came down from the Junction as fast as Number One could carry him.

He never lost his temper and he was always dignified. But there was blood in his eyes as he strode into Johnny's office that morning.

"I should like to ascertain," said the colonel coldly, "just who is running this railroad."

"We," said Johnny.

"Who are we?" the colonel asked.

"Why, you and I and all the personnel of the company."

"I agree with you perfectly," the colonel said, "but I should like to point out that each of us has his allotted duties and no one man runs it by himself, except that I am the executive head of the organization. I supposed that you understood that when you were employed. If not, I should like to impress that fact upon you now. On whose authority, young man, did you promise to the county at large that I would transport passengers on my railroad free and that I would be one of the principal speakers at the meeting?"

Johnny was speechless for just a minute. The colonel's question was terribly disconcerting. But presently his poise returned and he answered:

"I thought it wouldn't cost you anything extra, colonel, if we used that inducement to bring together the business men of this county for the purpose of saving your railroad."

"And just how," asked the colonel, "is a County Coöperative Association going to save my railroad?"

"That is one of the things, colonel, that will be explained at the meeting you are objecting to."

"I'm not objecting to it," the colonel retorted. "It's too late now to object to anything — after it's been broadcast all over the county. But you might at least have consulted me before taking liberties both with my name and my company."

"But I couldn't risk it," said Johnny. "You would have objected and then I'd have had to go ahead and do it, anyway, and you would have been angrier than you are now."

"How do you know I would have objected?"

"I had a hunch," Johnny explained.

"Well," said the colonel, "I must confess that your hunch was correct, Mr. Webster. As you have said, it will cost me nothing to offer free transportation to any one who wishes to attend your meeting. If anything ever comes of it, I will forgive you this breach of power. If not, I'm afraid you'll have to find other employment immediately —without my recommendation. By the way, just what do you want me to talk about on that occasion?"

"The condition of your railroad, colonel. Be as dramatic as possible and say that you will be unable to continue operations after whatever date you have decided to stop your service, unless there is a sufficient increase in business to warrant your continuing."

"Very well," said the colonel formally, "I will be here."

VIII.

During the next half dozen days Johnny received more than a hundred letters asking for sleeping accommodations on the night of the meeting. Johnny had not expected more than half that number, and he would not have been disappointed if only twenty-five or thirty enterprising men arrived in Richville on the night of April 3.

On that memorable day, and it was probably the most memorable of any in recent years in the annals of the county, all the fears and apprehensions and doubts that Johnny may have felt, were dispelled. Men living between the Junction and Richville arrived on the morning train, those who had cars kept coming all through the day from both directions, and the remainder arrived on the night train. The little auditorium was crowded.

Johnny had never addressed an audience of any kind before, and he was so nervous his clothes were drenched with perspiration before he even started to speak. Perhaps that was why he failed to notice the inconspicuous entrance of four men during the progress of the meeting who sort of edged into the room and took seats at the rear.

"All of you," said Johnny by way

of beginning, "thanks to the courtesy of our three newspapers, are aware of the purpose of this meeting and it will not be necessary to explain it now. First of all, I am going to introduce to you a real benefactor of humanity, the president of the Pelo County Railroad Company.

"Some of you will not agree with me in this, but the fact remains, as the railroad has been operating at an actual loss for some time, nevertheless, it has continued to operate. But a crisis has occurred"—Johnny had spent a good many sleepless nights in creating his oration—"a crisis has occurred, and Colonel Hacket's remarks will be of vital importance not only to you, but to every citizen of the county. To those of you who do not already know him, let me present Colonel Hacket."

Johnny turned and bowed to the colonel; the colonel rose from his chair on the platform and bowed to Johnny and they reversed positions.

The colonel's remarks were not entertaining, but the audience had not assembled to be entertained, and they listened attentively to the facts and figures which he discussed. Most of all, they were struck, of course, by his assertion that unless business on the railroad increased materially during the summer, it would be necessary, much against his will, to cease operations on the first of the next October.

He concluded his dissertation by saying:

"I will retire now and give the remainder of the time to the man who alone is responsible for this meeting; this effort to revive our particular section of the North Country, my worthy colleague, Mr. Johnny Webster. You men have been trying to survive in a ruthless territory where individual effort is too puny and where concerted endeavor is necessary. You have been trying to progress without a leader, without which no human enterprise can hope to succeed. But it is my sincere belief that in the man who has brought this assemblage together by his own, and, efforts, you have a leader who is worthy of being followed. I will leave it to him to consummate the business for which this meeting was called."

If Johnny had been nervous in the beginning, it was added to now by embarrassment. The colonel's eulogy had been a complete surprise and it upset what little poise he had managed to retain.

He paced the platform with quick, characteristic movements and as he looked out over the audience, no individual face was distinguishable in the mist that blurred the entire room.

"I am afraid," he began, "that my employer has been a little too enthusiastic. Whatever I have done was the result of sheer desperation, and I can only say that I am awfully glad it has turned out so well thus far.

"The colonel has pointed out to you what is necessary in order to maintain our only means of contact with the outside world. I am going to give you now my ideas of how this can be accomplished.

"It is true, we have little enough to start with, but that makes it all the more necessary that we stick together. Our forests are exhausted, our land is barren of minerals. Our only source of raw material lies in agriculture. Even that is a poor investment in this region, but we have to make the best of it.

"For example, milk, which is probably our chief product, is now being marketed individually by the producers in a haphazard manner for whatever price is to be had. By organized methods of selling, this milk, a good part of which is now being wasted for lack of a market, might be disposed of at a standard price to cheese and butter factories established and operated by local capital. The same thing could be done with pickles, and a canning factory could be established to supply a market for vegetables.

"The farmers in this locality are not

producing a fraction of what they might if they had a market for their products. Without a market they haven't the money to grow anything except for their own use and if they did produce more, how would they dispose of it? At present, they and everybody else in this county, are merely existing and nothing more. So much for the first part of our program.

"The second part involves advertising. We must advertise the products we contemplate marketing as coming from this county. There is a reason for this. The faith of a consumer in a product depends upon its familiarity. Instead of the produce coming from this county being merely butter, cheese, pickles and canned vegetables, the fact that Pelo County butter is good butter, that Pelo County cheese is of a uniformly high quality, that Pelo County eggs are always fresh, that Pelo County pickles are good pickles, that Pelo County canned vegetables are dependable and put up under the most sanitary conditions, must be impressed upon the public mind. Not only that, but the products themselves must bear out this impression.

"Of course, after the various companies are organized that are to manufacture these things, each will carry the burden of advertising its individual product.—But in the meantime, the missionary work must be done directly by this organization. In order to raise the money for this missionary work, we must have membership fees. The real purpose of this meeting is to organize the Pelo County Coöperative Association, to elect its officers, and to determine what shall be done to carry out this program.

"I shall now ask you gentlemen to elect from your number a man to preside over the organization, who will be in charge for the remainder of the evening and who will supervise the election of other officers and the appointing of specialized committees to attend to details."

Before Johnny could suggest a method of election, the colonel was on his feet.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I move that Johnny Webster be elected to that post by acclamation."

If there was a dissenting voice to this suggestion, it had no more chance of being heard than a mouse in a boiler factory, and Johnny was duly elected first president of the Pelo County Cooperative Association.

It was a very tired Johnny who adjourned the meeting two hours later after the election of a vice-chairman, a secretary and treasurer and the appointment of a membership committee, an agricultural committee and a business committee. The secretary had an enrollment of sixty-four members and the treasurer possessed three hundred and twenty dollars in fees, either in cash or pledges.

Before the hall was empty Johnny's arm had been pumped until it seemed paralyzed. But the colonel stood by him to the end and the last well wishers were the four men who had come in during the meeting. One of them was Gordon Allister.

"Where," said Johnny, bewildered, "did you come from?"

"Various places," replied Allister. "I would have been around to see you sooner, only I got wind of your meeting up at the Junction, and I didn't want to spoil your show. Let me congratulate you, Johnny."

"I thought you had run off and deserted me," Johnny commented. "That's how I got the idea of starting this association."

"It's a good idea, Johnny, though I assure you I had no intention of running away.

"I had not the least idea that you would take my leaving in that way. I only wanted to surprise you.

"Gentlemen," he addressed both the colonel and Johnny, "this is Dr. Northbeam, a world famous nerve specialist whom I have transported clear from

Switzerland to become the medical head of the Spruce Mountain Sanatorium. This," indicating to another of the three men, "is Mr. Thayer, the architect who will design the institution, and this," nodding toward the last man, "is Mr. Connor, the contractor who will build it. And, you, Johnny, are and always have been, the guiding genius of the whole performance and will have an equal share in its ownership, together with myself and two other gentlemen who are helping to finance it."

"Wait a minute," Colonel Hacket interrupted excitedly, "wait a minute. I have a counterproposition to make to you, Johnny, before you decide on anything. Were it not for you, my little old railroad would be only a corpse next October. As it is, because of what you have done to-night and because it was your suggestion that has resulted in this last enterprise, I have no fear but that we shall keep right on operating, at a profit, for a good many Octobers to come. I hereby offer you a half interest in the Pelo County Railroad and will teach you the business from beginning to end so that you can occupy my shoes when I am gone."

Johnny was downright puzzled. He looked quizzically from the colonel to Allister and back again. Then a twinkle appeared in his eyes and he said:

"The only way to succeed in this world, gentlemen, is to go in for one thing and stick to it. I am a railroad man now and I shall be till I die."

"God bless you," said the colonel.

THE END

THE OLDEST FREE COUNTRY

This question is sometimes raised:

"Which is the oldest republic in the world?"

If you happen to meet a professor of history and put that question to him, he's liable to come back at you with two answers.

"Well," he'll say, "if you mean which present-day republic has used its present form of government and constitution the longest—the answer is the United States."

Then he will continue somewhat in this vein:

"But if you are asking which country's citizens have been free the longest, the answer is little old Switzerland.

"In that land of high mountains and deep lakes, the people decided six hundred and thirty-seven years ago that they did not want any one governing them but themselves. So 'way back in 1291, two hundred and one years before Columbus discovered America, they threw out the ducal overlord, and discarded the yoke of his master for good and all."

Mountaineers all over the world, just like the natives of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the range riders of the Rockies, are apt to want freedom, want it enough to fight for it with their lives, and defend that liberty all their lives after they have won it.

This continual necessity of guarding their homes and their rights has developed the men of Switzerland from the stanch band which was gathered by the three men who took the original oath to free her, into a remarkably efficient defensive force.

In the ancient days when a whole army—with the exception of a few cavalry incased in armor so heavy that their war horses must have thought they were carrying cannon—consisted of infantry, Swiss soldiers were the most famous infantrymen in the world.

Their riflemen have always been such good shots that some admirer of the Swiss army once remarked that if an army of one hundred thousand Swiss met an attacking host of two hundred thousand men, all the Swiss would do is shoot twice.

However, during the World War, the Swiss did not fight; Switzerland was one of the few countries which was in a position to stay neutral. So she turned in and did her bit, with her customary efficiency, by taking in the most severely wounded captives from both sides of the battle-front, and curing them back to health and strength in the cool, dry air of her snow-capped Alps.

Thieves' Market

By JUDSON PHILIPS and BOYDEN SPARKES

"You fix the man right, and I'll take care of the girl"— thus the fate of the two spies was pronounced

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

BARRY RAND, one-time pilot in the R. A. F., despairing of making any progress in the Atlas Casualty Insurance Company, and desirous of making enough money to marry Jane Campbell, goes to the "big boss," old man Hamilton, and demands "a chance." Hamilton fires him and then promptly reëngages him as a special investigator to "get the goods" on Korbeck, a big fur fence who is known to be the director of almost all the fur stealing operations in New York City, but has successfully blocked all attempts by the police and private detectives to get any evidence against him. A few days later Korbeck's lieutenant, Nick the Grik, proprietor of an East Side pool parlor, commits a big fur robbery and arranges to bring the loot to Korbeck's huge warehouse. Jane Campbell, joining forces with Barry, gets a job as Korbeck's stenographer and gives Barry a tip to investigate Nick the Grik. In the meantime Korbeck checks on her story that she had been sent to him by the Star Agency. On finding it is not true he suspects she is a spy and orders one of his men to find out with whom she is working, adding grimly: "No one can get away with a game like that on me—not while they're still making guns 'at shoot straight."

CHAPTER IX.

"NINE, TEN, AND OUT."

BARRY RAND knew, with an irritating chill at the back of his neck, that his entrance into the Elite Pool Parlor had not been the inconspicuous affair he had planned it to be. As a concession to what he believed to be the Second Avenue standard of dress, he had abandoned his cane, his spats, and his English made soft felt hat.

A fuzzy cap, selected by him because it had seemed to be the acme of bad taste, was pulled low on his brow.

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He hoped that he had the appearance of one who belonged in such an environment.

Three of the pool tables were being played on by groups of Nick the Grik's friends and patrons. Truncated pyramids of yellow light illumined the green cloth of these tables, the pool balls, and now and again the face of some player who bent from the outer shadows in order to make a shot.

There was a reckless, hard selfishness in those faces that made Barry wonder what the minds they masked would think if his errand in the place was betrayed to them.

Barry had a vague sort of an idea that if he walked in and wrote his name on a slate, as he did at his club, that he would get an opponent for a game and so blend himself into the sinister background of the establishment. But there was no slate, only a pockmarked man who glared at him in a truculent manner from behind a shabby glass case of cigars.

Behind that pockmarked man's head on the wall Barry noticed some halftone pictures from an "art" magazine. They were not pictures of men.

"Hey, buddy," began Barry, "I'd like to shoot a game of pool. Can I find a game here?"

The pockmarked man continued to chew gum while he studied Barry in a fashion much more thorough than Barry had studied Second Avenue before he invaded it.

"What's the idea?" demanded the pockmarked man. "Gonna write up the place as a den of sin in one of the tablerds?"

"Tablerds?" repeated Barry in bewilderment.

"Sure, tablerds."

Johnny the Nutmeg Grater tapped his knuckles on a miniature pink newspaper that was spread beneath his elbows on top of the cigar case.

"I get you," acknowledged Barry, with a grin. "The tabloids."

"Ain't that what I said? This here paper's been giving pool rooms the raspberry for a week."

Barry was not eager to give offense to one who seemed to be in authority in this place, and he hastened to agree that "tabloid" was precisely the word Johnny had used.

"You see," he explained, "I've not been around New York long enough to know many people. I get kind of lonesome. Thought a little pool shooting might be good stuff for me. I'm not a reporter. Kind of wish I was. But what about a game?"

"Ast one of them guys against the wall."

Johnny the Nutmeg Grater dropped his eyes to the pages of the tabloid newspaper and resumed his gum chewing. Barry wondered if this uncouth city savage could be Nick Euthopopolis, but without seeking an immediate answer he turned to see if he could find a partner, or rather an opponent, and he succeeded.

Barry sensed as clearly as if he had been told that he was in a hostile atmosphere. Some way he had aroused the animosity of these pool room habitués.

His hackles rose as do those of a strange Airedale introduced into a kennel of chows. He began to wonder if he had not blundered in walking into the pool room without a better plan.

After all, his purpose was to make a contact with a person named Nick Euthopopolis. He might have achieved that meeting by employing a little finesse. He could have pretended to be selling books, or pool room supplies.

He was conscious of cold eyes that gleamed at him through the haze of cigarette smoke.

"Get on the other fellow's tail first," his chief had often cautioned him in France. "Don't wait to be shot at. Jump in and start the trouble."

It had been a good recipe for remaining alive in 1918. Probably, he thought, it would be as sound nine years after.

At one of the tables half a dozen young fellows were engaged in a game of Kelly pool. Two of them were quarreling vituperatively.

An older man, paunchy and unshaven, had reversed his cue threateningly.

"I'll do a stretch any time just for the fun of socking you—"

"Yes, you will, you ——"

The young gangster, already disfigured by a red scar that ran the length of his Semitic features, was equally adept in profanity, and with a significant gesture he unbuttoned his coat.

"Aw," complained the custodian of the leathern bottle containing the numbered pills that, when taken out furtively, served to identify for each player his ball—"aw, drop it. Hit each other whenever you feel like it, but don't make so much racket. I got a headache."

"How about letting me in this game?" asked Barry.

The Kelly-pool players, who had been waiting half uneasily, half hopefully for the development of the insulting conversation of the two who quarreled, all stared at Barry. They could have been no more resentful if the scene had been a Fifth Avenue club and Barry some down-and-out wretch who had sneaked past the doorman.

Finally the bottle shaker rolled a black pill along the green cloth of the table in Barry's direction and growled: "Ten cents for every ball killed; a jitney for scratches."

As he slid out of his coat and looked about for a nail on which to hang it, Barry wondered why some of the other players, two or three of them, were such unorthodox pool players as to continue to wear their coats. He wondered what those coats concealed.

Pool was a kind of passion with him, and after he had found a fairly satisfactory cue in one of the racks in the shadows he proceeded to pocket balls and collect dimes from the players with a flourishing pride in his skill that was successful in silencing all conversation in the game whenever his turn came.

Some instinct warned Barry that the paunchy, unshaven player was more actively hostile to him than the others. As he prepared to shoot, the paunchy one usually managed to snort, or with assumed carelessness to drop the butt of his cue to the floor, or in some other way distract Barry's attention.

Twice in succession Barry collected the pot by killing his own ball early, and each time the paunchy one, speaking out of the corner of a flaccid mouth, remarked foully about sharks who came where they were not wanted.

The black eight ball was lying close to the long rail partially in the shelter of the blue-striped ten ball when Barry's next turn came. With a cushion shot Barry smacked the eight ball fairly so that it in turn hit the ten ball, causing it to roll swiftly across the table and drop into the side pocket.

The paunchy one slammed his pool cue down on the floor in a sudden outburst of rage.

"You saw my ball when it came out of the bottle, didn't you? I've a good mind to crown you with this cue, you ——"

The outburst of profanity with which he then filled the air sickened Barry. He heard names applied to himself that in any corner of America mean fight; and he saw the paunchy one's dirty hand reaching clawlike to pick up one of the balls on the table.

"I must be quick," thought Barry, and took two short steps and swung his left fist overhand.

He was distinctly conscious of his knuckles against the bristly chin and the yellow teeth of the cursing player. The paunchy one went back on his heels and dropped flat, his head striking a shallow brass cuspidor so that it gave forth a sound like the crash of muted cymbals.

"Nine, ten, and out," said a strange voice at Barry's elbow. "Fellow, you can sock. Let me manage you and

teach you what I know, and we'll clean up big."

Barry was keeping his eye on the prone figure, but when he heard the owner of the voice addressed as "Nick," he turned.

"Yeah, there's real dough in those fists," Nick the Grik was saying.

"I shouldn't have struck him so hard," apologized Barry, with an uncomfortable feeling that the gentleman who had a proprietary interest in the ten ball was an unreasonably long time coming back to a state of consciousness.

"Aw, him?" Nick pointed contemptuously with a thumb. "He's had a poke in the jaw coming to him for a long time."

Then he raised his voice:

"Johnny, toss some ice water on this customer and watch the cash register till we git back. Come along."

CHAPTER X.

"EASY JACK."

IN a few minutes Barry found himself seated across a marble-topped table in a Roumanian resturant not far from the pool room.

"Now le'me tell you," Nick was saying in the manner of an old soldier to a young one, "there's big money in the fight racket and you don't have to be a champ to get it either. There's bruisers that are making forty, fifty, yeah, a hundred grand a year and never putting on half so good a show as you did with that one crack back there in the pool room."

"But I don't know anything about the boxing business," protested Barry.

"That's why you need a manager," insisted Nick. "I can handle you swell, so that there'll be plenty of jack for the both of us. Look at Jack Dempsey; he's rich and not so many years ago he was riding the rods."

"But I'm no Dempsey; I only weigh about one sixty."

"We'll build you up to one seventy. As a light heavy, boy!"

Nick rolled his eyes as one overcome by beautiful thoughts.

"Now listen," pleaded Barry, "you saw me hit a boozy man and knock him out. That doesn't prove I'd be any good in a ring. Why, anybody could have put that bum out."

Barry didn't quite believe that, but he wanted to hear Nick say how good he was, and Nick was in an obliging frame of mind.

"Anybody could, huh?" Nick's voice was shrill with the stress of his sarcasm. "Anybody boloney! Anybody applesauce. You don't know who that bum is, do you?"

"Well, I'll bite, who is he?"

"Get this," commanded Nick. "That guy is Kid Boru and six years ago he was middleweight champ for about two weeks. That's who he is. Ast anybody that ever saw him fight if he was easy to knock out. Just ast 'em."

"But he was getting ready to hit me with a pool ball," argued Barry. "If he's so good why didn't he depend on his fists?"

"Say, that bozo's always been able to take it, but the reason he's a has been is on account of his hands. They's brittle."

A warm sensation was beginning to make itself felt in the pit of Barry's stomach. Last week he would have been prepared to defend the affirmative side of a debate on the question: Resolved that all of the money making opportunities in America have been snatched up.

He had felt himself to be a hopeless failure. And now he was listening to an apparently sane man propose that he start out to enrich himself as a prize fighter.

The funny part of it all was that the proposal sounded perfectly feasible. It was almost with regret that Barry renounced the scheme in his own mind as he reminded himself that his table

companion was probably a crook engaged in stealing for an arch-crook, Morris Korbeck.

Then he thought of Jane with a twinge of conscience. Nick addressed him sharply:

"I ast you where do you flop?"

"Well, I haven't been in town long enough to find what I need in the way of quarters," said Barry evasively.

"Then I'll take you to a place where I can keep an eye on you, and next week I'll get you a fight over at the Sales Stables Sporting Club. What say?"

Nick took Barry to an old brick residence sandwiched in tightly between two squalid tenements in a near-by side street. Set in one of the tall front windows at one side of the high stone stoop with steps worn into deep hollows, was a cardboard sign on which had been crudely penciled, "Rooms."

They were admitted by a slatternly woman with her skirt turned up and pinned at the rear as if to shield it from the consequences of her own shiftless housekeeping. Her head was bound in a towel turban.

"The only room I got's on the top floor. It's six dollars a week."

"My friend can only pay four," said Nick flatly, "and four is a lot of dough, Mrs. Rouse."

"It 'll be four in advance. I'll call my husband and he'll show you where it is. Amos! Amos!"

She yelled down the cellar steps, through a door at the rear of the uncarpeted hallway as if she was demanding the attention of a dog.

A bald man, who stepped quickly as if conscious of wrong doing, turned into the hallway, showing timid eyes in bluish pouches.

"Coming, Henrietta!"

His voice was quavery; his manner placative.

"Show 'em the top floor room."

As they mounted one dark flight after another Barry breathed ghostly reminders of many meals. Some of them, he thought, probably had been eaten when Garfield was President.

"Now," said Nick in the tone of a caption, when the old man had left them in a narrow little room in which there stood a tall wardrobe with one door hanging from a broken hinge; and one single bed that was clean. "Now that you got a place to flop I'll arrange for your workouts."

Barry's mind had been turning over the state of his case through these moments since Nick had taken him in charge. His purpose was to get into Nick's confidence if possible in order to find out what his connection was with Morris Korbeck.

After all, if Nick wanted to think he was promising material out of which to make a profitable fighter, why, that was as good a way as any to gain his confidence and maintain a contact with him.

But there was Jane, and she was taking chances with a cold-hearted criminal that Barry dared not contemplate. The sooner he established some facts about the relationship between Korbeck and Nick the Grik the sooner he could release Jane from her dangerous post; and the sooner he could hope to reap some reward for his services.

With a feeling of discouragement Barry suddenly realized that he did not have any sound reason for believing that Nick was engaged in any sort of criminal activities. Jane had seemed to think—

"Look," ordered Nick, "the minute I saw you walk into my place I knew you were on the run. I don't know what you been doing, but a guy that can sock like you can—well, I'm for him.

"What's the chance of you being picked off? You know, they try to give bird dog puppies distemper so as not to lose any trained animals later. If you are likely to be knocked off by the cops I'd be foolish to waste much time on you."

"Good Lord," thought Barry, "this wop thinks I'm a crook of some sort. But then, what better thought could he have about me under the circumstances?"

With an air of seriousness he addressed himself to Nick:

"I'll tell you just how it is: I'm not sure they are looking for me—yet."

"Yeah?"

Nick was curious, but it would have been a serious breach of his code to have pressed Barry for further information; so he dropped the subject, seemingly satisfied with what Barry had chosen to say.

Barry felt a little stab of regret even as he realized that Nick was prepared to accept him as a crook without so much as a significant hint from himself.

His motive in seeking contact with Nick had been a desire, or half formed plan at least, to enlist in any gang of robbers of which Nick might be a member. He did not possess any knowledge that would have been admitted in any kind of a court as evidence, but nevertheless he was positive Nick was a robber, and if he was a robber he was beyond question disposing of the things he stole to Morris Korbeck.

Despite this Barry disliked the thought of being accepted as a person of criminal tendencies at sight when he had always prided himself on what he thought of as an open, frank countenance, one that was a certificate of good character. The thing puzzled him.

What he did not know was that Nick was like a small boy playing "cops and robbers." If you were not a cop, then, according to Nick's code, you must be a robber, for that was the way he viewed the world. There was a third element, of course, victims, the raw material of the burglar business.

"Look," said Nick who was sitting on the edge of the bed, twirling his hat on an index finger. "Some of my friends pick up some easy jack now an' 'en."

"I've never seen the time when I couldn't use more money than I had."

"Maybe we can cut you in on some of it."

A sensation of triumph warmed Barry so that he sounded positively grateful as he said with enthusiasm:

"Fine business."

Then in quick sentences Nick explained one of the problems that was troubling him. He spoke as freely as any ordinary business executive in talking about competition.

Rival gangsters, it seemed had stolen a truckload of silk that was being sent to the printing mills out in Paterson, New Jersey. It was a job that Nick and his associates had planned for a number of weeks.

They had even gone to the length of getting a man into the employ of the silk company in order to learn the schedule of the trucks. Sometimes these were sent out empty for no other purpose than to fool the highwaymen likely to be encountered anywhere on the eight hundred miles of street and road in Connecticut, New Jersey and New York that were used by the silk industry trucks.

Robbers expecting a loaded truck would be informed by their spy that the truck had left the establishment of the silk merchant. While the robbers were concentrating on the empty truck the loaded one would be sent out on its hazardous journey with a compact freight of some fifty thousand dollars' value.

"It takes patience to knock off a good silk truck," explained Nick, and then advanced his thesis by setting forth all of the details of the preliminary efforts of his gang.

"Then these West Siders beat us to it. They knew we had everything fixed. They got all the dope from one of our crowd that got drunk. Wouldn't that stop you? Ain't that a dirty deal? I ast you, now."

"What did you do about it?"

Barry asked the question almost timidly. He felt as one eavesdropping outside a confessional.

"Do about it?" Nick's voice was shrill with righteousness. "We went out and took the stuff from their drop off. Had it loaded into one of their own trucks and they couldn't squawk. they didn't dast fight us; but G—wasn't they sore!"

"Now what?" prompted Barry.

"Now we want to get the stuff out of our drop-off into the plant of a big fence, a bozo 'at runs a storage warehouse and keeps it filled from sub basement to roof with plunder lifted by half the good mobs in the East. He pays fair prices for the stuff he buys, too. Just the same he takes watching."

"How does he get away with it?"

Barry tried to inject something of dishonest admiration into his tone.

"Him? Say, he's got an airtight system. A slick baby. Never buys anything direct from the mob that gets it. Insists on regular papers.

"How often do you hear of a big fence going up the river, and why not? 'Cause they don't. They get rich.

"One of the big fur businesses in this town was built up by a man who traded in stolen furs. And you'll find 'em in the diamond business, in the silk business and all the rest. Not many; but a few in every business. They make a lot of money, but they don't have none of the fun of the business. Come on, let's go."

Nick led the way back to the pool room and as they walked Barry asked him boldly if he did not think he was taking a big chance on a stranger.

"Listen," directed Nick, "you could go tell everything I've told you to the grand jury—if the district attorney would let you—and would they believe you? No.

"Or if they did, could the district attorney get a conviction?

"Boy, if it was as easy as all that there wouldn't be any crime wave. This bozo Korbeck would get a better lawyer than there is in the service of the govamint.

"If the district attorney was a good lawyer he wouldn't want to be a district attorney. It's the advertising that makes 'em take that job and good lawyers don't need advertising."

They walked half a block, Barry silent; Nick whistling.

"Another thing," resumed Nick, "don't get the idea I'm a sap. A bit ago I let slip Korbeck's name. In this business a squealer's life is a short one, all right, but it is a long way from being merry.

"Remember Kid Mularkey? Di'n't you read about him? Criminy! They shot him down on the steps of the Tombs right after he testified.

"That happens every week, only not on the steps of the Tombs. Get me?"

"Sure," agreed Barry, "I get you."

As a matter of fact Barry was feeling wretchedly unclean from a sense of disloyalty. This crook who had offered with such engaging flattery to make him a rich prize fighter had winning qualities along with others that were undeniably detestable ones.

But Barry was not enjoying the rôle of spy, and from time to time cold shivers of dread chased up and down his spine as he thought of Jane Campbell in contact with these thieves. His fancy made him miserable by picturing her trying to flee from the pursuit of a leering Korbeck.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PORT OF MISSING GOODS.

IT was a couple of days later that Nick invited Barry to go along as a sort of supercargo with the truckload of stolen silk to the warehouse of Morris Korbeck.

"Y' ain't taking a chance even of stubbing your toe," explained Nick. "That truck's a regular one that we hired and the driver don't know what

he's got in those boxes. You just check the stuff into the warehouse and sign any name that occurs to you to some papers Korbeck will hand you.

"This is raw silk, you know, and it's about as easy to identify as one pint of sea water from another pint of sea water.

"If you should be grabbed why, all you do is to say you were hired to ride on the truck as a guard. We'll have a lawyer spring you before they get you to headquarters. But you won't be grabbed."

The driver of the truck was a taciturn man whose chin, for lack of teeth, was pressed up and out of sight, Andy Gump fashion, into a wilderness of amber-colored mustache. The steering wheel of the truck was mounted on an upright post so that the manipulation of it was not unlike the setting of a hand brake on a freight car.

As they jolted eastward in Twenty-Third Street toward First Avenue for the trip to Korbeck's headquarters, Barry now and again heard the truck driver whisper an oath. Clutching the loop of metal secured to the side of the seat so as to keep from being bounced off he wondered if the driver was cursing him.

"What's troubling you?" Barry asked.

First taking time to swallow, the driver finally answered:

"This is a lousy world."

"When did you make that important discovery?"

"Aw, I've known it for a long time; but what can I do about it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I'd like to make some improvements myself."

"They tell me I got a load of silk here."

The truck chauffeur lifted one hairy hand from the wheel in order to point a thumb backward over his shoulder.

"That's what they tell me, too," agreed Barry, wondering when this queer person would get to the point of his rambling remarks.

"There might be a little jack in it for both of us if we could shift one of these boxes off and put another one in its place before we get to the warehouse."

"There might," agreed Barry, "but it would be stealing."

"It depends on how you look at it," retorted the driver, but his tone was not argumentative and Barry wondered uncomfortably if the man knew that his load was stolen goods.

Every time they were halted in a cluster of other vehicles by the whistle of a traffic policeman Barry felt a timorous wave of regret at his situation. He did not mind risking his life, he thought, but he would hate to have to defend himself from the charge of theft.

In spite of all his regrets and worries he was warmed by something he did not analyze until the truck came within sight of the fortresslike cube of bleak walls that was the Empire Storage & Hauling Company's stronghold. Then he remembered: He might get a chance to see Jane while he was attending to his job as supercargo for a gang of land pirates.

Any task that brought him in contact with Jane was a good task. He was whistling a fragment of a tune as the truck turned into the arcaded entrance of the warehouse and backed up to a loading platform.

Men with hand trucks were waiting to cart the packing cases into the depths of the huge building, and within a few minutes the cast metal wheels of these porters' vehicles were clinking and squeaking in an unending procession as the boxes were trundled into the warehouse.

"Hey, Charlie, does this stuff go to the fourth floor or up in them bins on the sixth?"

The question was bellowed by a giant of a man with hairy forearms that rippled like those of a gorilla as he scratched himself uncertainly on the chin with a crooked middle finger. The

giant seemed to be in charge of the unloading.

"Up on the sixt', up on the sixt', stupid."

This was shouted from the doorway of the office by a small, waspish man, whose withered, yellowish jaws clutched a double row of false teeth behind tight, thin lips.

"All right," retorted the giant mildly. "No harm done."

The trundling procession resumed its progress, and Barry wondered what he should do next. Many an investigator has had cause to ponder on that problem.

Barry realized suddenly with a sense of something like failure that what progress his investigation had made so far was due to three factors that did not bring him any extraordinary amount of merit.

The most important information had come from Hamilton; then the next had been the offering of Jane; and then, due to a fancy for him conceived by Nick the Grik, he had learned many things that tended to corroborate all that Hamilton had said about Korbeck's underworld connections.

But the investigator was beginning to understand that to persuade one's self of the truth of a set of facts was a process much easier to accomplish than the persuasion of a judge and jury. At least, he determined, he would see the inside of that warehouse.

"I want to see where this silk is going to be stored," he said, addressing himself to the waspish man whom the giant had called "Charlie."

"You came with it?"

Charlie's voice reeked with suspicion.

"Yes." Barry was purposely curt.

"Hey, Korsovsky."

The big foreman turned and waited silently for instructions.

"Take this man up with you; he wants to see how you're going to pack these boxes."

"All right, Charlie. Come on, mister."

They rode up slowly in a freight elevator with dimensions and power great enough to have lifted the largest of automobile trucks.

As the car passed each floor a wooden gate was automatically raised and lowered, and Barry's eyes strained to see enough to make a comprehensible picture of the long avenues of piled up merchandise, the pyramids of barrels, the corridors of closed and sealed chambers, the mounds of household goods, each mound representing the material part of a home in storage.

Some of the mounds were large enough to have filled a good-sized room —and the mounds had been skillfully built so that in the semidarkness Barry had difficulty in focusing his eyes quickly enough to discern any of the stored objects before the rising of the car shut off his view of a floor.

"It's a big building," boasted Korsovsky. "If there should be a fire the boss downstairs with one lever could close all the fire doors dividing the building in half."

"With so much stuff worth a lot of money I should think thieves would bother you," commented Barry with a shrewd hope of finding out more about the structural arrangement of the warehouse.

"A fat chance for the thief, mister. There's only one way to get out, and that's the way you came in. If a thief comes in here we get him like a rat in a trap.

"Besides, all the stuff worth stealing—furs, silks—are in sealed chambers. Silverware and such things are kept in vaults."

"Well," said Barry, trying to sound playful, "why should a burglar bother to break into one little house or apartment, when he can come to a place like this, where the contents of hundreds and hundreds of houses are stored?"

"Say, mister, breaking into this place would not be so easy," said Kor-

sovsky solemnly. "See how thick the walls are. All of the windows are protected with bars like a jail; and there is only the one door, and a watchman's there always. This way."

Barry followed the foreman along a musty corridor of heavy doors closed and sealed until they came to a compact chamber, where the door stood open.

"That stuff of yours goes in here," explained the foreman. "If you take my advice you'll have it sent through the fumigating room. A few moths in those boxes could do a lot of damage.

"We got a chamber on this floor, where we do all that work. Hydrocyanic acid or carbon disulphide and the moths or moth eggs—fooey!"

"Gosh!" exclaimed Barry. "Are you not afraid of gassing yourself?"

"Oh, we don't take any chances. We got to be careful, on account the Board of Health raises hell if we don't. I'll show you the room."

It proved to be a drab, uninteresting chamber with a wide door that, when closed, was tighter than water-tight, according to the foreman's boast. A pungent, nose tickling odor clung to the room.

An arrangement of pipes penetrated the wall from the room beyond. A cylindrical pipe disappeared through the ceiling. In the corridor wall a porthole was set that gave a view of the interior of this lethal chamber of vermin.

Several large steel tanks fitted to pipes, equipped with valves, revealed to Barry the ease with which the flow of gas could be controlled by an operator standing at that porthole.

When he returned to the ground floor Barry went boldly to the office, and his heart jumped when he discovered Jane Campbell bent over a typewriter on which she was giving a thoroughly unmusical performance.

"I'd like to speak to the boss, please." Barry grinned as Jane raised her head like a startled deer. "But if I can't see the boss, I think a sight of you will completely serve my purpose."

"Well, you can't see the boss," she replied merrily, "because, I'm thankful to say, he's away. I've been hungry to see you."

Barry was starting forward with the very obvious intention of embracing the new secretary of Morris Korbeck, when he observed an expression of fright sweep across her face.

"I tell you, Mr. Korbeck is out," she said to him sternly in a tone that brought him up short.

Then Barry saw that the door of Korbeck's private office had been opened a few inches, and a man was standing there watching him with something more than casual interest.

"Time to side slip," Barry warned himself, and then loudly, almost boorishly, he complained: "Well, I can't hang around here all day. Get somebody else to give me a receipt for the boxes I brought here."

"Mr. Pedrick will attend to you," said Jane coldly, and summoned that person from the loading platform.

When he appeared, Barry recognized him as "Charlie."

With little loss of time Barry was required to sign a paper which he saw committed him to the surrender of the articles he was placing in storage, provided he failed to pay the storage charges for a period of two years. In return he was given a warehouse receipt. This, he saw, was dated 1923.

Jane, he observed, from time to time was squinting at herself in a small mirror in the lid of her compact, and dabbing powder on her nose. This prolonged attention to such things was so unlike Jane's normal behavior that Barry pondered on it.

Then with an inward grin of appreciation he found an excuse to pass closely behind her, and on the face of her tiny looking-glass read two words: "Call me." They had been chalked

with a broken bit of the powder cake from her compact.

"I'll have to move along," said Barry, addressing himself to Charlie Pedrick, and then, raising his voice: "I've got some telephoning to do."

CHAPTER XII.

TIPPED OFF.

WHEN a tall, thin man, with a heavily lined face and long, sensitive fingers approached Jan Rasmussen, the Dutch superintendent of the Brayley Apartment building, representing himself as an inquiry agent from the Acme Credit Company, Mr. Rasmussen was wholly unsuspicious. People who lived in the building were often trying to buy things on the installment plan and Mr. Rasmussen had been invited to answer questions very frequently.

The credit company always sent some one out to verify addresses, and pick up what information they could for their clients. Sometimes Mr. Rasmussen was forced to give unsatisfactory reports, and the tenants never knew that if their Christmas tip had been larger they most certainly would not have been refused credit by the butcher, the baker, or the furniture dealer.

In this case, however, Mr. Rasmussen was very pleased to be able to tell the tall, thin man that Miss Jane Campbell was a very reliable young woman. In fact, she was one of the most prompt payers in the building.

She worked for some one in the book business, he thought. Moreover, she had a "steady" who was a very nice young man. He didn't add that this opinion had been formed because that young man occasionally left a cigar, or a quarter in Mr. Rasmussen's hand when he went home.

The tall, thin man did not immediately report to his company. Instead he waited in the shadow of a near-by building for Miss Campbell's "steady" to arrive. He was still waiting when the young man left several hours later, and he followed him.

The next morning Barry Rand's landlady was being asked the same series of questions that Mr. Rasmussen had answered. The tall, thin man learned that Mr. Rand, like his fiancée, was quite prompt in his payments and a good risk.

Mr. Rand worked for an insurance company. The tall, thin man emitted a low whistle when he heard this bit of information, and was very eager to know if the landlady was *sure* about Mr. Rand's business. She was.

A day later the tall, thin man, who was no more an agent of the Acme Credit Company than he was a Congressman, sauntered into Morris Korbeck's office.

"Well, Meeker?"

Meeker sat on the edge of Korbeck's desk.

"It smells pretty bad," he said. "Looks to me like some one was playing games with you. Look.

"This Campbell girl is working for a book publisher. She quits. Now she has a fellow, see? He's working for an insurance company. *He* quits."

"What insurance company?" asked Korbeck.

"That I don't know."

"How do you know he quit, then?"

"Because"—and Meeker spoke slowly to emphasize his words—"because he's hanging around Nick's place. As a matter of fact, he was in on a job with Nick, I think.

"He was in your office not ten minutes ago. He was extra man on that truck load of stuff you just stored away."

Korbeck bit savagely on his unlighted cigar.

"You think maybe he's working for the insurance company still?"

Meeker nodded.

"It's funny that this Campbell dame should know the exact moment when

you need a new girl. It's funny that at the same time her fellow should should show up at Nick's.

"He got in a row with Kid Boru and knocked him for a loop. Nick took him under his wing.

"I don't know what insurance company he was working for, but I'll bet a nickel he's still with 'em and working under cover. If I was you I wouldn't leave anything important lying around. It's my opinion these two kids are laying to get you."

Korbeck laughed.

"Get me? Say, where the hell do you get that stuff? They got a fat chance. I know how to deal with sneaks, by God!

"What's the fellow's name?"

"Rand. Barry Rand."

"Well, we'll soon cook Mr. Rand's goose."

And Korbeck laughed again.

CHAPTER XIII.

PANIC.

NICK EUTHOPOPOLIS was panting as he ran up the stairs that echoed hollowly beneath his pounding feet. At the top he clutched the banister railing and pulled himself up to the landing and then almost tumbled into the darkened pool parlor. His breath wheezed audibly so that he clutched his throat with one hand as if to still its noise. Nick was trying to listen for some significant sounds.

The pool room was deserted except for Johnny the Nutmeg Grater. His pock-marked face was lined with an expression of alarm as he came from behind the cigar case.

"What's a matter, Nick?" he asked in a tone of deep concern.

"A bull."

Nick gasped the word, but continued to listen.

"Aw, they ain't got anything on you," said Johnny in an effort to be consoling, but he looked frightened.

"This one slipped up on me while I was shifting license plates on a car I bent s'afternoon."

"Recognize you?"

"Don't know. If he follows me here I'll plug him sure. I won't do a stretch. I won't."

"But what did you have to be bothering with a car for? Why di'n't you let a expert do that for you?"

"Had a few drinks, Johnny. Listen!"

A step had sounded on the stairs outside. There was a profound silence; then the creaking of more steps. Some one, a heavy some one was mounting the flight.

Almost viciously Nick waved his associate into the shadows of the darkened room in which the covered shapes of pool tables seemed like the catafalques of dead giants. Behind one of these Nick took his stand.

At his back was the wall closet with a glass door in which were the switches controlling all the lights in the big chamber.

A shadow loomed across the glass doors at the head of the stairs. Then Nick heard the knob rattle and the squeak of a dry hinge as one of the doors swung inward.

One of Nick's hands was inside his coat, clutching the butt of his forty-five automatic. The other hand trembled at the small handle of the switch controlling the flood light at the doorway.

Seconds of time elapsed that were so charged with emotion that Nick's throat seemed to bubble at the pulses. They were seconds in which Nick could have been induced to renounce burglary if only he could have been assured of immunity from arrest.

Two facts were beating against his better judgment. The man whose car he had stolen earlier in the afternoon had seen him and would be able to identify him if he was arrested. The shadowy figure now standing in his doorway had come to arrest him.

Nick's fingers extended themselves against the switch handle. It was hardly an act of his will. A third of the room flooded with light.

Standing there as if on a stage was a blue-coated policeman, two vertical rows of brass buttons catching the light and shining bravely.

There sounded a faint clicking. The policeman's right hand was fumbling under the skirts of his heavy coat.

"Come on out, you—" he was saying when there was a great roar of sound, as deafening in that confined space as a clap of thunder.

The plume of coppery flame was a living thing in the darkness. Nick was hardly conscious of the impulses that had tightened his fingers and aimed that angular weight of metal against which his hand was sweating; but he tugged the darkness back into the room by dragging at the switch handle.

Only the light of the pistol flash continued to glow in front of his eyes.

There was no sound for a perceptible interval, during which Nick clutched the pistol butt, kept hold of the light switch and bit hard on his lower lip to keep from crying aloud with excitement.

Then he heard:

"May ye roast in hell."

After that there was a sound of something falling heavily to the floor. It sounded as if a sack of potatoes had been dropped.

"Nick, Nick, he's down!" That was Johnny. "I think you must have killed him."

"Shut up you pockmarked—"

All of the moments in the years he had been rehearsing this murder were bunched then in Nick's memory, and he knew himself for a fool. It took all his will power to muster the strength to throw the light switch once more.

Every nerve in his body seemed to twitch under the stress of a panicky desire to run and run. But when he did turn on the light Nick walked over, pistol muzzle held at his hip in line with the spot where that policeman had stood.

The blue clad body was lying face down, the fingers of one relaxed hand were limp against the pearl handle of a revolver in a hip pocket holster.

Nick's nostrils were filled with the acrid odor of burned powder. A wet spot was widening about a small tear in the broad expanse of blue coat.

"Clean through him," gasped Johnny at his elbow.

"Help me roll it under a table," he said curtly, and pushed at the hips of his victim.

Johnny shoved at the shoulders and Nick's teeth began to chatter as he saw the head roll to one side so that the open, filmy eyes seemed to gaze at him.

"What are you going to do?" Johnny seemed to be trying to speak soothingly. "You can't leave this bull here very long, Nick. You gotta do something."

"I know," agreed Nick. "I'm going out after some dough. I may decide to lam out of it. You watch the place till I get back."

"Like hell I will! When you go out of here I go out with you. Lock the dump up.

"I always thought you was a wise one. Now you do some fast thinking or you'll burn in Sing Sing. If you'd kept your head we could have fixed an alibi for you easy."

Johnny made hissing sounds as if to express some of his contempt for the lack of judgment that had brought on this situation.

"All right," growled Nick, combatting a sudden desire to give way to something very like seasickness. "Stay with me till I see can I get some jack. Will you do that, huh? Johnny, will you?"

"Where are you going?" Johnny's manner was decidedly cold.

"I'm going to see Korbeck. Try and get some more of that fur jack

from him and something for the silk."

"Are you going to tell him why you're in such a hurry?"

"I am not."

By way of giving emphasis to his words Nick turned the key in the lock of the pool room door and then clattered down the stairs breathing audibly.

"Wait for me," advised Johnny. "You and me are going to be seen coming out of this place together if we are seen at all."

CHAPTER XIV.

"FIX HIM SMART."

"LOOK," exclaimed Korbeck, "I'm a business man! I keep my money in the bank and a check I will not give you."

"I don't want any check," growled Nick. "I want cash and a lot of it."

"In my pocket I got six, maybe seven hundred dollars. I'll give you five hundred and not a cent more. Next time let me know when you are coming and I can arrange to have something for you. But I got something more important than money for you."

Only Korbeck and Nick were in the office of the warehouse. A watchman was lounging against the door in the corridor. Johnny the Nutmeg Grater was keeping out of sight somewhere in the vicinity.

Nick kept rubbing viciously at his nose with a clenched forefinger. His nerves were playing tricks on him.

"I have found out," said Korbeck with a leisurely pompousness that infuriated the nervous gangster, "that my secretary here has been trying to find out things."

"Yeah?"

"She's a pretty girl."

"I don't have to take your word for that. She's a—" Nick smacked his lips and then breathed noisily as he remembered something that brought back all his deep sense of oppression, his fears. "Say, hurry up, will you?"

"Don't get excited. I'm telling you something. This girl has a friend, a boy friend. She's spying on me and the boy friend is spying on you, maybe."

"What's that?" Nick fairly barked the words.

"The boy friend is spying on you."

"Who is he? Who is the—"

"Wait now. I thought you'd be interested."

"Tell me! Quick!"

"It's that fellow that came up here with the silk. Say, I thought you were a smart boy, Nick. I can't afford to do business with a sap. Too dangerous."

"You mean a good-looking bozo with a flashy way of wearing clothes?" Nick's left hand was scraping frantically across dry lips. "Do you mean him?"

"I mean a man named Barry Rand that planted this Campbell girl in my office. That's who I mean."

"I am a sap," agreed Nick crushed by his fears. "Why, I don't even know his name, but if it's the guy that brought the silk here—if that's the rat, I know who you mean.

"I'll fix him and I won't waste any time doing it, either."

"Use your head for a change, then," advised Korbeck. "Fix him like a smart boy would. Don't leave any odors hanging around, neither.

"You fix him and I'll attend to his girl."

"All right," said Nick. "Give me that half grand. And if you see me to-morrow you'll know I'm after more. I want real jack the next trip."

"You needn't count it," Korbeck said indignantly.

"Listen, I'm through taking things for granted. I count my jack and I'll drop a little acid on the next guy—a stool! What do you think of that—"

Nick was swearing as he strode out into the darkness.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE COAL BIN.

BECAUSE of his baldness, old Amos Rouse invariably adjusted a black skull cap to his head before descending the hall staircase into the drafty passageways of the shadowy cellar.

About six times a day throughout the winter Amos was required to make that descent in order to put coal on the fire in the furnace, to shake down the ashes, or to alter the drafts.

If Amos was five minutes late in making that trip to the cellar, his wife raised such a rumpus that he was glad to hurry down there to get out of her sight, if not out of hearing. At least he would have been glad if he had not disliked the cellar so much.

If Amos had been less timid, it is unlikely that he would have been content to act as his wife's helper in the rooming house enterprise by which they kept alive. The house was his by inheritance, but all of the energy, the bargaining, the nagging, the pinching and the rest of the unpleasant effort that was required to keep the rooms rented and to collect the rents—all that was contributed by his wife.

"If you had a morsel of spunk," she would say to him on almost any occasion, "we'd be living in Florida winters."

Rather than precipitate rows more bitter than his gentle, cowardly soul could bear, Amos Rouse made his six trips to the cellar every day, and many were the imaginary adventures he had down there.

Once a cat had slipped in from the street through the basement door and had startled him into a trembling state of panic by rubbing against his legs in the dark. When he tried to chase the creature, after partially recovering, he made such a racket that his wife took charge of the hunt, and then scolded him again for not having put a decent lock on the basement door.

"Anybody can walk in there," she had charged with bitterness; "but a lot you care."

"I'll fix it, Henrietta, I'll fix it."

"When?"

This was always delivered in the same sneering tone. It was a word, in her mouth, witheringly scornful.

"To-morrow I'll fix it surely. You give me the money for the lock, and to-morrow—"

Then Henrietta would start all over again.

It was with a mild sort of horror always that Amos started down the cellar steps. But there was nothing mild about his retreat to the first floor when his duties were finished.

He would play games with himself, pretending that he carried huge and powerful rifles, or that he was accompanied by a group of friends. Sometimes it was a sword with which his fancy armed him, but these protections were of too flimsy a character to withstand the terrors that assailed him as he started up the stairs, helpless against assault from the rear.

Sometimes he was routed entirely at the first landing and ran the last few steps. If he walked boldly to the top step without quickening his stride and without looking backward, he felt a faint glow of pride, and had it been possible would have bestowed on himself a worthy decoration.

The truth may as well be told: Amos Rouse was, or at least had been, what used to be called a hard drinker. Several times he had suffered spells in which he had confessed to the doctor that he was "seeing things." So it was that his mind assisted his primitive fears to populate that dark cellar with frightful creatures that never assumed definite shapes, but always had quite definite designs on the life of Amos Rouse.

This night it was about eleven o'clock when Amos Rouse, following his usual custom, inserted his hand through the doorway, fumbled for the electric light button, and then, when the stairs were less shadowy, started down.

The ashes had to be rolled out to the street. Methodically, but with his heart pounding, Amos started rolling the galvanized iron can along the passageway. Once his foot slipped on a spot of moisture, and he paused, affrighted, because he thought he had heard other footsteps echoing his own. Then he was shocked to find the door swinging open and the narrow passageway leading from the entrance under the front stoop filled with cold, damp air. He told himself he would simply have to fix that lock.

With a series of grunts he lifted the heavy can of ashes up the steps, one step at a time. After rolling the can to the curbstone he hurried back into the cellar, determined to get through with his unpleasant task.

Grasping the iron lever with which the grates in the furnace were shaken so as to dislodge the ashes in the shallow pit below, Amos rocked it back and forth.

He was still breathing heavily from his exertions with the ash can, and thought, wearily, of the doctor's warning about his heart.

"No strains," he had said, "and no shocks. No more drinking."

Amos sighed, and reached into the pit with the shovel for ashes with which to cover the glowing coals. He always did this so that the fire would not burn itself out wastefully during the night.

He put the coal on last, after he had set and wound an alarm clock suspended from the ceiling. An intricate system of chains, springs and weights closed doors and opened drafts in the morning when the alarm went off.

Climbing down from the ladder with which he reached the clock suspended from the ceiling, Amos shuffled over to the coal bin, picked up his shovel, and bent low. He always put four shovelfuls on at night.

He shoved the blade of the scoop into the blackness of the coal pile, lifted it, and then, turning, swung the charge into the furnace door. The second time he pressed the scoop into the pile he fancied he felt a wad of rags with the edge of the blade. It seemed to him also that the coal pile was dwindling less rapidly than usual.

The third time his shovel gouged into the pile there was no mistaking the fact that the scoop was pressing into something that was not coal. It was something of less hardness than coal, but something that resisted strangely the expert shove of his knee against his elbow.

Stooping forward in the darkness, Amos reached out with exploring fingers to see what kind of rubbish had been thrown in with the coal. Then his hand encountered something cold and rubbery.

It was a human face. In the first surge of emotion Amos tried to call his wife's name, but no sound came from his lips. He tried to run, and crashed into the partition that formed one side of the coal bin.

Hands seemed to be reaching for him from all sides, and the hands were not living hands.

If Amos Rouse could have known precisely what he had found hidden there in his coal bin, he would not have suffered half so much from paralyzing fright. It was because he did not know that every dark corner around him seemed to be piled with dead things.

How he dragged himself up the cellar steps he never knew, but he was pathetically grateful because his Henrietta was standing there as he crossed his awful frontier—the doorsill of the cellar steps.

It was no more than fifteen minutes

later that two policemen of a near-by station arrived in a flivver. A few minutes later the first of many squads of detectives began to swarm into the house. The body that Amos had uncovered with his shovel in the coal bin was the body of a policeman, a murdered policeman who had been shot through the heart.

Instead of the regulation patent leather visored cap with its nickel-plated badge the head of the victim was incased to the ears in an old derby. Instead of a brass-buttoned uniform coat the slightly stiffened figure was clad in a greasy, pull-on green sweater of the style that bicycle riders used to wear, one of those sweaters that laced up about the neck with a shoe string.

CHAPTER XVI.

"COP KILLER."

BARRY after an evening with Jane had stopped at the pool room with the idea of having a little chat with Nick. He was surprised to find the place closed and deserted. So he started to his room.

The house was so quiet that the escapement noises of an aged clock in the living room filled his ears with a *tic-toc-tic-toc* as he mounted the stairs Now and then he kicked one of the brass rods with which the carpet was cleated.

Barry was profoundly disturbed by the things Jane had told him. In the first place he had merely intended to telephone her in response to her brief message, "Call me" written on the glass of her compact.

But when he had telephoned, her nervousness had been so apparent that he had determined to risk a visit, indiscreet though it might be.

Jane had been almost tearful as she had explained to him how she had discovered they were being watched, and watched, likely enough by those whom they were supposed to be watching. The superintendent of the building had spoken to her about the visitor who had represented himself as an investigator for a credit concern.

At first Barry had been inclined to treat the incident lightly. The credit companies were continually making inquiries about persons who bought things on the installment plan or who opened charge accounts. He had tried to convey this idea to Jane, hoping to soothe her.

"But Barry, don't you see that is why I am so sure this inquiry represents something sinister. I never charged anything in my life. It was almost a religion in my home that we pay cash or go without."

Mounting to his floor Barry's hair was prickling with fears that were not for himself. Jane was being watched. Nick's place was unaccountably closed. What did it mean?

The facts seemed to bear some relation to each other. He was still puzzling as he fumbled in the darkness for the knob of his room door. He thought he heard a sound in the room.

As he flung the door open and stepped in, air fanned the back of his neck as the door was slammed shut behind him by unseen hands. Some one with a harsh voice addressed him:

"Take it easy now, or we'll rip your guts wide open. Up with 'em!"

Only fools ignore that command when it comes from the darkness. Barry's hands went up until his elbow joints were pressing against his ears.

"They are up," he said, as quietly as he knew how.

Then he was blinded by a sudden burst of white light in his eyes as some one he could not see flashed a hand torch beam in his face. Next the wall light was turned on and Barry discovered that his room was crowded with men, three of them in police uniforms.

His first reaction was one of amusement. He thought how foolish they were all going to look when they dis-

covered they were in the wrong room leveling revolvers at the wrong man.

He never gave expression to the laugh that was in his throat, though, because he was hit viciously on the side of the head so that involuntarily he brought down his arms to grasp the place where he had been struck. His knees bent and he kept from falling only by exerting all his will power.

"I must not let go. I must not," he said to himself.

Barry did not know why, but there was a coldness in the manner of his captors that persuaded him without any word from them that they were hoping he would offer some kind of physical resistance.

Suddenly he was kicked from behind, kicked so hard that he thought he would lose consciousness. He had half turned to confront his attacker when one of the uniformed policemen slapped him in the face and called him names unprintable—epithets for which Barry could have killed him without regret; soul-scorching, foul names that made Barry writhe with indignation. But every man who stood crowded around menaced him with either a revolver or a blackjack or a club.

"Nix, Rogan," protested one of the men in plain clothes who seemed to be in authority.

"Nix, hell!" exclaimed the policeman who had slapped Barry. "This dirty rat killed my buddy."

The words were as a dash of cold water on Barry's fading wits. He saw that the policeman's face was streaked with tears.

"Isn't it a little irregular," he said, "to beat up a prisoner before you have made sure that you have the right man? You are talking about killing.

"I haven't done any killing, but I promise you that if I ever get the chance I'll kill the next man that strikes me. It n ay take time, but by God if there is any law that gives you the right to treat me in this fashion I'll find laws of my own to deal with you."

It sounded futile in his own ears. He felt an almost overpowering hunger to gibber oaths and insults, to cry and kick; but everything he had ever learned, every bit of discipline to which his body had ever been subject warned him to keep his head.

"Bring along the electric chair's next bit of fresh meat," ordered the detective who had chided the policeman for slapping Barry.

The cold steel of a handcuff was snapped on his wrist. A sense of helplessness overcame Barry as he descended the stairs.

As he rounded the second floor to go down the last flight a large hand was pressed against his face and then shoved hard. Because of the chain that bound his arms Barry could not sway from the straight arm, and his neck hurt cruelly as his head bent sharply.

The epithet that Barry then applied to the dim figure that had pushed him was one he had learned in France.

"I'll pay you for that one, me bucko, when we get to headquarters. We have special treatments there for cop killers."

Cop killer. So that was it. They believed he was responsible for killing a policeman.

A cold ache in the pit of his stomach was identified by Barry as fear. He had felt that sensation before and was not ashamed of it. The only thing that could make him ashamed was a feeling that he was being influenced by fear.

A half a dozen persons were standing in front of the house as Barry was brought out onto the stoop. Two of them were policemen.

A faint sense of pride began to stir in Barry. At least they had considered him dangerous. He was not half as chagrined as if his indignities had been inflicted by two or even three policemen.

They crowded him into the tonneau of a big open car and roared away,

dashing through narrow East Side streets at a reckless speed that would have meant pursuit for any car not marked by those impressive initials: "P. D."

Police headquarters received Barry almost before he knew what had happened to him. The squad closed about him as they mounted the steps, but not enough to cut him off from a semicircle of camera men with tripod legs tangled together like some strange engine of war.

There was an explosion and a blinding glare in Barry's face that made the dim light of the corridor seem afterward like darkness. Barry stumbled and was jerked impatiently by the detective who was chained to him.

In a daze he found himself standing in a long, thickly carpeted chamber containing glass cases for the display of a collection of weapons, each tagged with brief details of the crime in which it had figured. A group of men who were standing at a desk at one end of the chamber crowded forward to gaze at him.

There was one with a thin black mustache whose power there was sufficient to keep the other men silent. This one spoke:

"Take him downstairs," he said quietly, "and talk to him."

CHAPTER XVII.

SAVED FOR ANOTHER TIME.

THERE was a shabby golden oak roll top desk in the room in the basement. Bunches of posters offering rewards for an assortment of fugitive humanity were displayed on the walls.

Barry was aware suddenly that there were only three men in the room with him and that the door had been shut.

"Sit down, Jack," invited one of the three, almost softly and placed a cane seated chair beside the desk.

Barry accepted the invitation and then realized for the first time that the handcuff was no longer fettered to his wrist.

"Will you be good enough to tell me what this is all about?" he asked with a genuine hope that he would get a satisfactory answer.

"Where'dja get this?"

The detective had suddenly thrust something under Barry's nose. It was an army automatic. Barry's fingers were thoroughly accustomed to its rude shape.

"It isn't mine," he denied.

"It was in your room," said the detective almost in a whisper, "and it was hanging in back of that old wardrobe. What 'ja kill 'im for?"

"I think we can save time if you will tell me of what crime I am accused."

"Jack, I don't want to give you the rough stuff; in fact, I won't, but so help me—" he paused impressively so that Barry believed him—"if you don't tell me I'll go out and leave you to deal with men who are practiced in making men speak when they don't want to speak.

"Come on, now, come clean and save a lot of trouble. You can't get away, you know. It's a dead open and shut case."

"What case? I heard one of you speak of me as a cop killer. I haven't killed any one in several years."

"Oh, ho, you do kill 'em sometimes then? Well, that's a start. Where did you kill the last ones?"

"That," explained Barry, "was in France."

The detective ran his hands through his hair with a gesture of weariness.

"I've been a dick for ten years," he said, "and I suppose I'll be here ten or maybe twelve years longer so I might as well make up my mind to it.

"Every time we make a grab we're going to have to listen to that applesauce: 'I was a so'jer boy.' Say! Listen to me! I was a soldier, too. What do you think of that, hey? But that

don't give me the right to—say, I'm through arguing with you."

"You need not argue," said Barry. "I shall be glad to answer your questions, but it is quite useless to try to browbeat me. It cannot be done.

"See here. I'm not a fool. You don't dare kill me here. You don't dare even injure me seriously.

"You might give a hard beating to some prisoner with a criminal record and get away with it, for none would believe him. But my record is clean; better than that, I'm proud of it."

The detective snorted scornfully, but sat there fiddling with a pen holder. His two companions were listening intently.

Barry wondered if his own estimate of the situation was correct. When the detective resumed the conversation in a softer tone he felt somewhat better. He was not as sure as he might have been that they would not kill him.

"A policeman was found dead in the cellar of that house where you are living," said the detective musingly. "He had been shot with an automatic pistol of the same caliber as one which is later found in your room upstairs. Your pistol had been fired recently. Question: Who killed the policeman?"

"Those circumstances might justify suspicion," admitted Barry. "But they certainly do not justify the abuse to which I have been subjected."

"Aw," complained one of the other men, "don't split hairs with the rat. Let's give him the works."

"Shut up, Rogan. Now then, you, what's your name?"

"Well, that is a sensible question and easily answered: Barry Rand."

"None of that lippy stuff now. How old are you?"

"Twenty-six."

"You look older. Born in this country?"

The questions flowed along in a steady monotone for awhile until the detective asked:

"What were you doing down in that neighborhood? Where'd you meet Nick the Grik? Huh?"

"What is your rank in the police department?" asked Barry in turn.

"I'm an acting captain of detectives. Good enough for you?"

"Plenty," agreed Barry. "Now if you will ask these other men to step out of earshot and will give me your word not to allow what I say to get into the newspapers I'll answer those questions."

A gleam of triumph came into the deep-set eyes of the detective.

"You fellows can step outside."

It was an order and they left.

"I have your word?" temporized Barry.

"Sure, sure. I never tell the newspapers anything."

"If you will call Hamilton of the Atlas Casualty Insurance Company he will verify for you what I am about to say. I am a special investigator trying, at his direction, to establish a link between the gang of which this Nick seems to be head and a receiver of stolen property."

The detective was genuinely interested, but somewhat skeptical.

"Tell me the name of the fence."

"Not a chance." Barry's tone was impressively final. "You get in touch with Hamilton and he'll soon persuade you that what I say is true. If he wants to tell you the name of this fence he may do so."

"Why won't you tell the name of the fence? We don't like fences. Go on and tell me the name of the fence."

"I can't do that." Barry spoke with rather more of emotion in his voice than he intended. "It's this way: A person working with me is now at work in the establishment of the fence. If I speak this person might be killed or harmed.

"Besides, all that we have done so far would be wasted. The whole gang could conceal evidence—"

"You know what?" The detective had turned in his swivel chair so that

he faced Barry. "Your whole —— story sounds like a pipe dream.

"Now come across! Tell me why you killed that cop. Where did you kill him? What did you do with his uniform cap and coat? Come on now, I'm tired of this. You can't make a sucker out of me."

Barry was not sure, but he thought he detected a note of uncertainty behind the detective's blustering.

"Call Hamilton," he said pleasantly. "If I was going to hide a body would I hide it in the house where I was staying? Would I conceal such a damnable piece of evidence as that pistol is in my own room?

"Be reasonable. And, by the way, how can you be so positive this policeman was killed by a weapon of the same caliber.

"I have seen plenty of gunshot wounds. I know I could not say positively what weapon killed a man."

"There are plenty of men in that neighborhood who would kill a policeman. Why don't you look for some of them?"

"Don't you try to tell me how to handle my job," warned the detective.

"Go on now, be a good fellow and call Hamilton."

"Hey, Rogan! You fellows come back here and watch this bird. You know what to do if he makes a move. I've got some telephoning to do."

A few hours later Barry, who was slumped in his chair and was half dozing was aroused by a rude shaking.

"Come on, we're going to leave you in a cell for awhile."

This was a man in plain clothes he had not seen before. As he passed down the corridor to a row of cells half a dozen uniformed policemen crowded forward.

"That's him," declared one of them.

He suddenly struck at Barry with his night stick. He was young and vigorous. If the blow had landed it might have fractured Barry's skull, but the policeman's arm was caught in mid flight by one of his companions and then several of the others seized him.

"That," identified the detective who now had Barry in custody, "is the brother of the officer you knocked off."

He placed his hand between Barry's shoulders and shoved with all his strength. Instead of being thrown forward, however, Barry set his muscles, threw out his hands and braced himself against the iron frame of the cell door.

"Do you want me to go in here?" he said. "I'll go in if that is on the program, but I'd like to bet you all the money I've got against a month of your pay that I can lick you with my fists, you big stiff."

"When they cook you up at Sing Sing about six weeks from now," retorted the detective, "I'll be there to tell you good-by—

"God! How I'd like to kick you in the belly, but the chief says we're to save you for another time, you filthy cop killer!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Yuma Tom uses his wits to work his way out of a situation that seems to have him completely hemmed in

The Red Man's Way

By JOSEPH T. KESCEL

A FIGURE darkened the sunlit doorway. Sheriff Bob Hunter, tall, grizzled, and coatless, raised his keen gray-blue eyes from the paper in his hand and looked across his scarred pine desk at his visitor.

There, coming forward in the light step of the red man, was little old Yuma Tom, a dark-gray Indian-woven blanket draped loosely around his shoulders and an eagle's feather canted back in his black hair.

"How, Mista Bob!" he said, sticking out his hand. "I readum your smoke signal from hills, and ridum here heap fast."

"How, Little Gray Eagle! I'm just mighty glad to see you."

Sheriff Hunter arose and stepped around his desk. He sometimes addressed the old redskin by his tribal name, though usually he called him "Tom."

They shook hands before Hunter, motioning toward a chair, invited: "Sit down, Tom. I want to have quite a powwow with you."

The tall sheriff seated himself on the edge of his desk as Yuma Tom took the chair.

"Tom, I've got another job for you, if you'll help me out. A sort of delicate job."

They were old and tried friends, this pair, and on numerous occasions the sheriff had called upon the famous

little tracker with the piercing black eyes to run criminals to earth. Sometimes they worked together; but as a rule, unless it looked like a job for a posse, Yuma Tom trailed alone.

"What has just come up is nigh onto the most ticklish thing I've had to deal with since I was first elected to office, years ago," the sheriff went on, after a glance toward the door to make sure no one was eavesdropping.

"More than three hundred head of horses have been stolen from the ranchers round about here, and, accordin' to signs and tracks, been hustled across the line into Mexico. As you can easy enough imagine, the ranchers are good and plenty hostile, and threaten to go after their horses, whether or no."

"Um-m." Yuma Tom grunted and crossed his moccasined feet. He already knew that neither United States officers nor citizens could, even when chasing criminals, ride at will around Mexico as they could in their own country.

Sheriff Hunter interpreted the old red man's grunt to mean that he was ready to hear what was wanted of him, so he resumed in a low tone, leaning forward:

"The ranchers have half promised to give me a chance. Though some of 'em growled that if I was figurin' on help from Mexican authorities I might just as well go to bed.

"Of course I didn't tell any of 'em that I had you in mind to get their horses back. That would be tipping our hand, so to speak, and might put you in extra danger. But I did caution them that the Mexicans would probably look at a big crowd of white men, ridin' fast into their country, as some sort of an invadin' force, and put up a fight."

Yuma Tom grunted again. "I sabe. You want me to get ponies. Getum kinda slick, huh?"

"Yeah, Tom. That's it exactly. Want 'em mighty bad. Not alone, either, to make my word good with the ranchers, but also maybe to prevent a nasty scrap. For our white brothers are sure ready to go on the warpath. I'd like to get the rustlers, too. But that, I reckon, is clean out of the question—with one man against I don't know how many."

"Um-m." Yuma Tom's piercing, coal-black eyes were expressionless, but Hunter thought he saw just the flicker of a smile on the Indian's red lips.

Rising, Yuma Tom held out his hand. "I sabe, Mista Bob. It make you glad if I getum ponies. And Great White Father say that heap slick, huh?"

"Yea, Tom. You can rest assured, too, that the ranchers will make it right with you if you can in some way get their horses back. Or send word to me where they are."

"Um-m. I go now. I think I know way bad mans drive ponies to Mexico. In one hour I tell for sure."

Together they walked to the hitching rail in front of the jail, where Yuma Tom's favorite mount, a sleek-coated, great-chested, superbly built strawberry roan stallion, Red Gold, was tied.

This splendid animal had been, until captured by the little red man, the leader of a band of wild horses which roamed the San Gloria foothills.

No one save Yuma Tom had ever been on Red Gold's back, or knew his speed and wonderful intelligence, though Sheriff Hunter had often said: "That there big stallion and Little Gray Eagle fair love each other. What is more, the stallion seems to sabe every word Tom says to him."

Behind the cantle, securely tied in place, was a pair of Indian-tanned saddlebags, apparently full of emergency rations for horse and master. Half hidden in its fringed, buckskin scabbard was Yuma Tom's well protected repeating rifle.

"Adios, Mista Bob! Lookum out for my smoke signal, which tell you whether I am right."

With the ease of a supple young warrior, the old Indian swung lightly into the saddle, touched his moccasined heels to the stallion's glossy sides, and galloped southward along Calito's dusty Main Street, flanked by its low buildings of board or adobe.

As soon as the last house lay behind, a red flannel Apache headband took the place of Yuma Tom's eagle feather. His shirt, trousers, and blanket were made into a roll, tied behind the saddle, and he rode on—a wiry little red man, naked save for headband, breechcloth, with sheathed knife dangling from its waist thongs, and fringed, knee-length combination moccasins and leggings.

A wiry little old man on a galloping big stallion whose unshod hoofs seemed scarcely to touch the ground.

An hour later, having verified his suspicions as to which way the outlaws were traveling, Yuma Tom, from the hills ten miles south of Calito, sent up a smoke signal, which Sheriff Hunter deciphered as he stood on the jail's flat roof.

Signs and tracks had, as he rode along through the low hills, told Yuma Tom much that he wanted to know. Now, in the morning sunlight, afoot, bent over, gaze fixed on the ground, and with Red Gold following doglike behind him, he moved slowly along through the low brush and cactus at the base of a rocky hill.

He had found something decidedly interesting. Something that probably would have escaped the eyes of the white man altogether, and very likely those of even the most experienced trackers of his own tribe.

A little farther ahead, as he studied the footprints of a man, close beside the hoofmarks he had been following, he nodded. The rider who had dismounted to rearrange his saddle blanket was a Mexican. The animal he had been riding was a mule.

And what a mule she was! Fast, intelligent, and not a great while before, when Red Gold ran with his band, she had often raced along in the lead when danger threatened, while the mighty stallion thundered at the rear of the herd, giving encouragement to the slower animals and nipping the flanks of the laggards to make them run faster.

Yuma Tom was not mistaken in thinking that he recognized those neat-looking hoofprints. He had seen them too many times before the mule was captured by Jim Bentley, a rancher, who proudly spoke of her as "my Annaliza, the dog-gonedest, smartest critter in the whole Southwest."

Every once in awhile Yuma Tom's experienced eyes saw a break in the print of the outline of the right forehoof. He had noticed only the week before, when visiting Bentley's ranch, that a piece of Annaliza's right forehoof had been chipped off and that the tracks she left in the corral were the same as those he was now following.

In stealing the fleet-footed, dark gray mule, the horse thieves had shown good judgment, of its kind.

Quite a number of the horses run off had earlier been in the wild band led by Red Gold and Annaliza. They would remember her and feel at ease with her at hand, even on a strange range. Within a very short time she would again be a leader to them all.

What horse thief had been clever enough to think of Annaliza? Yuma Tom guessed at once it was Blas Cannales, a one-eyed, brown-faced, heavy set Mexican with a bad scar across the bridge of his nose, and who was ten years the little red man's junior.

Cannales's nickname was the Chihuahua Fox. Yuma Tom was often called by white settlers the old Apache Fox. So, as the little red man mounted and rode on, he said grimly to himself: "It is very possible that the Indian fox will have to match his wits against those of the Mexican."

It was five o'clock in the afternoon before Yuma Tom saw the dust cloud

which he felt sure was kicked up by the horses stolen by the rustlers, who, so signs and tracks had told him, numbered seven.

The Chihuahua Fox probably thought that he had been clever in making false trails. He very likely would have deceived a white tracker, but not the nearly naked redskin, who, sitting easily in his saddle, sent Red Gold forward in rapid, ground-covering strides.

Darkness would be no handicap, for there was no need of further trailing. Yuma Tom knew that Cannales and his men, with the stolen horses, would rest at Bonito Spring, a grass-fringed water hole at the base of a low hill on a desert flat.

Bonito Spring was an oasis in the desert, known to but few. To the south, for nearly eighty miles, at this time of year, there was no water. To the west and east, also, for about the same distance, the country was arid.

Midnight came, passed, and it was getting along toward daylight when Yuma Tom dismounted and, with Red Gold following close behind, entered the mouth of a sandy-bottomed dry wash, which ran crookedly across the flat. Down here, out of sight, he hoped to get close enough to the herd of horses to carry out the plan he had in mind.

His moccasins made scarcely a sound, and the stallion's unshod hoofs were equally noiseless as they went windingly forward. Yet as the little red man stepped around a sharp turn, a cold rifle muzzle was suddenly jabbed against his bare chest and Ramon Escudon snarled: "Raise your hands!"

Yuma Tom promptly obeyed.

Ramon, a sharp-featured young Mexican of twenty-four, with known crimes enough against him to send him to jail for a long term, if he were captured in the United States, leaned forward and peered into his captive's face.

"Aha! Aha!" he chuckled gleefully in Spanish. "The Apache Fox has fallen into the hands of his better, the Chihuahua Fox. He posted me here with the expectation that the gringo sheriff would call for help on his old tracker amigo. Great will be the pleasure of my capitan when he sees you. So I will now take your weapons and march you to him."

Yuma Tom's only sign that he had heard was a half audible grunt. He had deliberately taken a chance in approaching the horse thieves' camp through the dry wash, and now stood ready to face the consequences.

Through the darkness, as ahead of his captor Yuma Tom neared Bonito Spring, he made out the dim forms of a number of horses. Some were standing near the water. Others were browsing on the scanty pasture. Still others were lying down.

Glancing back over his shoulder, he saw that Ramon was leading Red Gold.

He spoke to the Mexican in Spanish: "My mount is thirsty. When we reach the water hole, you will take off his bridle so that he can drink?"

"I'll do more than that," Ramon laughed, raising his voice to warn the guard at the spring he was approaching. "I will take off his saddle, too. For now your wonderful stallion is another of our herd. Our fox capitan will be much pleased."

A sharp voice came out of the darkness: "Who is it?"

"It is I, Ramon. And I have with me an important captive."

The horses moved aside to make room for Yuma Tom and his captor to walk on. It was pretty dark. Yet Yuma Tom could distinguish the circular outlines of the water hole, nearly a hundred feet across, and five dim figures standing close to Bonito Spring, at the base of the low hill.

Suddenly a raucous "Haw he-e-e-e! Haw he-e-e-e!" burst out, a few yards distant.

In return Red Gold nickered softly.

Yuma Tom indistinctly made out the dark gray mule, Annaliza, picketed at the edge of the water hole.

Five men, revolvers in hand, walked hurriedly forward and peered at Ramon's prisoner.

Yuma Tom, peering back, recognized Blas Cannales and his four companions. They were all Mexicans and all wanted in the United States on various charges, cattle rustling and horse stealing being only two of their offenses. Sheriff Hunter would be a heartily pleased man to land them in jail.

"Aha! Aha!" Blas jubilated. "The old Apache Fox! The true amigo of Sheriff Roberto Hunter! And he is in our power. You did well, Ramon. I congratulate you.

"There, too, is the wonderful stallion. This is indeed a lucky capture. The remarkable mule, who has already made herself leader of our herd, was a great find. The horses will not leave her. She is to them like the bell mule in a pack train. But yet we would rather have the beautiful Red Gold than even the celebrated mule."

Although he spoke so elatedly, Blas was doing some rapid thinking. What ought they to do with the little red man now that they had him?

His first thought was to put him out of the way. But how many Apaches were aware that their old tribesman had ridden into Mexico? Blas knew that if he asked he would not find out. Still he felt that he must not let Yuma Tom go back to Calito and tell what he had learned.

"Tie the old Indio's feet as well as his hands," Blas ordered, thinking that even though he approved of putting Yuma Tom out of the way, it might be better to talk things over with his men. "Then," he added, "let him lie on the ground with our saddles near the spring. You, Jose, go tell Pedro to come here."

"*Sí, señor.*" Jose Sanchez, a slender all round cutthroat and rustler, started for the top of the hill, where on guard lay Pedro Blanco, another rustler and desperado.

Ramon, without waiting for orders, took off Red Gold's saddle and bridle and let the thirsty animal go alone to the water hole.

Before the stallion had drunk his fill, the little red man, hands securely tied in front of him and ankles lashed together, lay beside the rustlers' waterskins, within a yard of the spring.

"Come over here," Blas called, ordering his men to come with him out of earshot of the old Indian.

Yuma Tom had no doubt as to what would be agreed upon. The verdict would unanimously be to kill him.

They might delay his execution until daylight. That was all. But in the end, unless he could escape or show cause why he should not be killed, he must expect the worst.

Yet, although his original plan had failed, his quick brain had already devised a substitute for it. He made a low, hissing sound to the big stallion.

Red Gold stepped back from the water and, his ears tipped forward, eyed his old master. Annaliza came as close as her picket rope would permit.

A number of horses crowded around her. Others which had been lying down, got up.

The minutes slipped by rapidly. Darkness was slowly changing to gray dawn.

Jose and Pedro, having joined Blas and the others, whispered what they thought ought to be done with the old Indian.

"We all agree then that he is to have the knife," the hard-faced leader began, when Ramon, happening to glance toward the spring, growled an exclamation and swung his hand to his revolver holster.

His fellow rascals hitched quickly about, and in the gray light saw the scantily clad old Indian, an unfolded blanket in his hands, hopping on his ankle-bound legs straight toward the big stallion.

Six six-shooters were simultaneous-

ly jerked from their holsters and leveled. Yet before the bent brown fingers touched the triggers, the outlaw leader yelled: "Do not shoot! Do not shoot! You may stampede the horses."

Up went Yuma Tom's tied hands, unfolding the blanket to its full length and width. Down they came again as, still hopping forward, he flaunted the blanket, like a huge danger signal, squarely before the wondering, alarmed stallion's eyes.

Red Gold snorted and stamped a forefoot. What was this all about? Why was his old master bobbing toward him, snapping the blanket at him, while the cursing Mexicans dashed closer on a mad run?

"Go! Run!" Yuma Tom yelled. "Go to my people. Yi! Yi! Yip, ki yi!"

With his last bloodcurdling yell, he snapped the blanket fairly against Red Gold's eyes.

The stallion whistled shrilly and wheeled about. He whistled again, and Annaliza answered with a hoarse, far-reaching, "Haw he-e-e-e!"

It was the same answer she had given him in those free days, when he had whistled that danger threatened.

Red Gold began another whistle that ended in a squeal, as Blas bellowed at Yuma Tom to stop.

Annaliza whirled around. That was her old signal to take the lead, while the fleet-footed stallion took the rear and urged on the slower animals and laggards.

By now, every horse was on its feet, head upflung and nostrils distended.

"Haw he-e-e!" Annaliza, disregarding entirely her picket rope, dashed away. Still braying, she pounded among the nearer of the herd.

She was in full stride—neck outstretched, ears back, and short tail well raised—when, with a snap, she came to the end of her tether.

Blas and his running men expected to see the rope send the mule somersaulting. Instead, the halter ring to which it was tied, ripped free and, like a hissing snake, it whipped back against the side of a half broken mustang.

Once, twice, thrice the mustang snorted before racing after the hee-hawing Annaliza, fast reaching the lead edge of the herd.

"Yi! Yi!" Yuma Tom called shrilly. "Go to my people!"

Already galloping ahead, Red Gold bumped against a brown cow pony, and it was away on a fast run.

Off to the right was a fat, lazy gray mare, who seemed disinclined to move. Red Gold squealed to her and then nipped her none too gently on the flank. The mare squealed back, and let drive a sidewise kick. Yet, snorting, she tore past several laggards.

The big stallion was soon upon them, whistling, squealing, nipping. This was like the old days. The wily gray mule was out there ahead, leading. He was behind, where now the most danger threatened.

Nip, whistle, squeal! The horses were all moving. Now at a trot. Next at a gallop. Then in a rapid, pounding roar they thundered away from Bonito Spring, northward.

Blas Cannales himself was the first to reach old Yuma Tom and, with a sweep of his arm, to send him tumbling to the ground.

"What did you do that for, Indio?" he bawled. "Those horses cannot be caught. Every one of them has gone."

"*Si, señor.* So they have," the little red man returned, speaking in Blas's own tongue. "Red Gold and the mule will lead them to my people. Still, I think that as you are the Chihuahua Fox, you will guess that I, the Apache Fox, had a reason.

"Without mounts, you will be careful what you do to me. Had you horses, you would undoubtedly kill me. But now you will reflect."

"We need no horses to reach a place of safety to the south," Ramon put in angrily, glaring down at the old red-

skin. "We can fill our waterskins here and travel afoot."

"You could fill your waterskins and do as you say—awhile ago, *señor,*" Yuma Tom replied with a significant little pause. "But now they will not hold water. While lying beside them, I managed to insert my bound hands and moccasin toes into their open throats, and ripped them clear to the bottom."

"What? You what? You—" Blas cut himself off, and ordered sharply: "Ramon, go and see if this red dog speaks the truth."

Ramon was gone and back within a few seconds.

"He speaks the truth, chief. The waterskins are absolutely useless."

Blas thumbed up the hammer of his six-shooter and glared at Yuma Tom, now sitting up.

"Why did you do that, Indio?"

"To save my life, Chihuahua Fox. I know where there is a spring within walking distance of here. The Apaches know much that the Mexicans do not. If I am a corpse, I cannot lead you there. Alive, I can.

"You and your men are not used to walking. Your boots, even, are high of heel and pointed at the toe. To travel eighty miles to the south, without water, is out of the question for you. Vultures would have you all before a second sunup. Therefore you will think long before you kill me. Is it not so?

"Water is here aplenty. But you have nothing in which to carry any with you for the trip.

"You are the captors. I am the captive. Yet I taunt you that I trade life for life. If I am killed, you will all die of thirst, if you leave. And of hunger, if you stay here. So after we have something to eat, we will start for the little, hidden spring I know of, yes?"

Blas grunted and motioned his men to come with him a few paces away.

"Do any of you know where there is water this side of Oso Spring, to the south?" he asked.

None of them did.

"Then," said Blas sullenly, "we cannot give him the knife now. The only thing to do is to give in to him here—and later kill him at the spring he knows of. There is such a place, because I have heard the Indios speak of it."

Much as they disliked to yield, life was more to them than vengeance. And returning to their prisoner, they removed his bonds.

Whatever doubts Yuma Tom might have had as to the success of his strategy were about dispelled when, at sunrise the next morning, he looked back at the thirsty, haggard, dust-powdered men trudging close behind him on a dusty alkali flat.

Since leaving the water hole they had plodded up and down low hills, through dry cañons, rocky gullies, and sandy, level stretches toward the spring to which he had promised to lead them.

In the beginning they had been heavily armed: rifles on their shoulders and holstered revolvers hanging from full cartridge belts. But long ago the rifles had been thrown away, the cartridge belts discarded, and now they had only their revolvers, carried in their hands or stuck in between their shirts and the waistbands of their trousers.

None of the outlaws was used to walking. Their muscles were sore, their feet blistered, and each step had become agony.

"Hey! Hold on there," Blas called, in a voice that was trembling and husky.

Yuma Tom stopped and waited. When his captors reached him, Blas croaked: "How much farther is it to that spring you spoke of?"

"I do not know, exactly," Yuma Tom lied. "I have to go on a little farther to get a landmark."

As he spoke, he wondered how much longer it would be before the horse

thieves would break. The hot, hard walk of the day before and through the night had brought them close to the breaking point. But he knew they must be brought yet more completely under his control before he could manage them as he had planned.

He thought the time was fast approaching when in the forenoon, with a blistering sun beating down upon them, Ramon stumbled and with difficulty succeeded in keeping his feet.

"Here! Let me help you along," Yuma Tom volunteered. He slipped his arm around Ramon's waist. "We ought to reach the spring before dark."

"Before dark?" Ramon echoed aghast. "Is it still as far as that? I can never make it."

"Oh, yes, you can," Yuma Tom encouraged him. "Keep going. Head for that red butte yonder."

Blas licked his dry, cracked lips with a tongue that was just as dry. "Is the spring there?"

"I did not say so, *señor*," Yuma Tom fenced, shifting Ramon a little in front of him and suddenly grabbing the six-shooter from the Mexican's waistband.

With a push, Ramon was sent tumbling to the ground, and as Yuma Tom raised the gun he had just seized, he thumbed the hammer to full cock.

"Up with your hands!" he commanded.

For an instant it looked as if Blas meant to put up a fight. But when he saw his men raise their hands, he lifted his own.

Yuma Tom took their weapons and, with the exception of a long-bladed knife and a revolver, threw them away.

"Now turn sharply to the right and march toward those rocky hills to the north yonder," he ordered. "The spring is in a hidden cañon, well inside the United States. There I will send up a smoke signal to my Apache brothers, who, when they come, will bring with them my old amigo, Sheriff Roberto Hunter."

THE END

BOOK COVERS

BOOK covers bind a wealth of lore,
But know not what they hold,
Book covers keep a learnéd store,
A very hoard of gold;

And on their faces tell the world
Of that which lies within—
A pretty face in gilding burled—
But beauty is so thin.

They tell the world in titled blare
Of printed tales they keep,
But do not know of what they bear:
They never reach the deep.

Book covers that pretend so much,
That seem to hold the keys
To truths that they can never touch—
Some people are like these!

Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift.

Red Hot

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "Coast of Blue," "Desperate Chances," etc.

In which the author shows that you'll have an exciting time if you try to keep a good man down

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PREVIOUS PARTS

LESTER LUCUS and his classmate, Arthur "Chipmunk" Colter, have started into the retail frankfurter business together, on Lester's enterprise, Chipmunk's money, and with the encouragement of Hilda and Francesca Brinker, daughters of Ludwig Brinker, the millionaire sausage king. They open their first hot-dog stand in an old Broadway building, underneath the platinum firm of Gander and Gruen. When Nora Meagher, a friend of Lester's, does not see them for days, she finds two rough looking men running their stand. An old tramp named Walter Downing, whom Lester had befriended, tells her he knows that the men are crooks. After Downing promises to phone her at seven that evening, Nora goes to the Brinker home and enlists the aid of Hilda and Francesca.

CHAPTER XVI.

THREE IN A TAXI.

BY this time it was three o'clock, as Nora observed by her wrist watch when she left the Brinker residence. It would be three thirty by the time she got back to the office, perhaps later, and under the circumstances she could not compose herself to type letters.

She determined to go down town, however, and make another inspection of the frankfurter stand. This time she took the subway, which proved more rapid than the taxi had been and, emerging at Fulton Street, she moved with the crowd past the establishment of Lester Lucus.

There were no customers, she observed, and the man she had talked with was making no effort to draw trade. He was seated inside the counter reading a newspaper. The second man was not visible.

Her eyes snapped angrily, then she considered that it was better to sell nothing at all than to give the stand a bad reputation by handing out the kind of stuff they were using.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 14

On Sunday Lester had raved about his hot-dog trust. He would have hundreds of stands and clean up a fortune in no time. His enthusiasm had carried her off her feet at the moment, but she saw now that the weakness of the plan was the fact that he must depend upon hired help.

Perhaps this man was a sample of the persons who would operate the trust locations and, in that case, the enterprise was doomed to disaster. It might be true that the boys were off securing locations, but that did not explain why they were not at their homes at night.

It was possible that they had left the city upon some business errand of which she knew nothing, and in their absence these employees were purchasing inferior goods and pocketing the difference in price.

Suppose she was injuring the affairs of Lester and Chipmunk by announcing their disappearance. Les might be very angry if she put the police on his trail, and it would be an admission that she was very much interested in him if she betrayed such anxiety.

Nora was not willing that Les should learn how much she was interested in him just yet. However, the tramp had assured her that these men were criminals, that he knew them; he said he had warned Lester.

Perhaps that was when Lester had hired them; most likely he knew the old man and took no stock in his statements. Nora's pretty little head was aching with all these pros and cons, and her feet, in her high-heeled slippers, were tiring, for she marched past the stand a dozen times in an hour.

She kept her eyes open for the tramp, but she did not see that bundle of rags during her vigil. Fear of the policeman was probably a more powerful motive with him than friendship for Lester Lucus.

Finally she took the subway for the long journey to the top of the town, torn between hopes and fears and, in her little apartment, to the concern of her good aunt, she was unable to eat dinner.

The minute hand of the clock moved very slowly between six and seven, but eventually it was a quarter of the hour, ten minutes, five minutes and at last seven o'clock.

The phone bell did not ring. For an interminable hour she waited. The tramp had failed her. She called the home of Ludwig Brinker and asked for Miss Hilda, who came breathless to the phone.

"Well?" demanded the blond girl. "What did he say."

"He has not called," she said dolefully. "I don't know what to do."

"We've been telephoning around," Hilda told her. "Arthur has not been in his hotel since Monday morning and none of our mutual friends have seen him. We haven't dared discuss it with father. Fran says we have nothing to discuss, that it's all a mare's nest; but I'm scared."

"I'm going to the police," said Nora sharply. "There is no need of you young ladies being mixed up in it. It might hurt you socially."

"Nonsense," snapped Hilda. "Get a taxi and call for me. I'll slip out without telling Fran or dad."

"You darling!" exclaimed Nora. "I'll be there in half an hour."

She jammed her hat upon her curly head—no time for prinking—called "good night" to her aunt, and fled from the apartment. As she stepped out of the elevator upon the ground floor she encountered Randolph Milligan, a box of candy under his arm, a lavender handkerchief peeping from the pocket of his blue serge coat, and a beaming smile upon his ordinarily severe countenance.

"Caught you just in time!" he exclaimed. "Where are you going, Nora?"

"I'm in a hurry," she ejaculated. "Don't delay me."

"But you knew I was coming tonight."

"That's a safe bet almost any night," she retorted as she made for the street door.

"I brought you some candy," he protested, displaying the box.

"That was sweet of you. Take it upstairs if you like."

"Then you are coming back? When?"

"I don't know. Wait! You know Miss Hilda Brinker, don't you?"

"We have a speaking acquaintance."

"Good. You'll be our escort."

Impressed by her manner and the name of Brinker, he hailed a passing Yellow cab, wondering as he helped her in, how Nora happened to be going somewhere with Hilda Brinker, whom he was aware she had not known a few days before.

"Tell him to go first to Miss Brinker's home," the girl instructed, and Ranny repeated the order before he demanded an explanation.

"What is it all about, please, Nora?" he inquired.

"Oh," ejaculated Nora, and threw him a dubious look. Having but one thing on her mind and having commandeered the young man because an escort might be useful, she had forgotten that upon the one occasion that Mr. Milligan had encountered Mr. Lucus they had behaved like a couple of Thomas cats. Furthermore Ranny despised Lester because of his occupation and would probably resent being forced to head an expedition in search of him.

"How do you happen to be friends with Miss Brinker? I didn't know you knew her," he continued.

"I haven't known her long," she evaded. "A mutual friend of ours is in some difficulty. I'll let her tell you, I think." Nora rightly surmised that Ranny might be tongue-tied in the presence of his employer's daughter, and certainly would not presume to interrogate her.

She had considerable trouble keeping him in the dark during the long ride, but she managed it, aided somewhat by the fact that Mr. Milligan was rather pleased at the opportunity of meeting Hilda Brinker in another capacity than office jackal, and considered that it would do him no harm in a business way to be of some service to her.

Ranny was rather a good-looking young man of high moral principle and serious purpose, but the purpose was to do his best for Randolph Milligan. By strict attention to duty, by saving his money and keeping his eyes open, he hoped to lift himself in the world.

In sane, sensible moments he was aware that his infatuation for Nora Meagher, who was lovely but penniless, was not very wise in view of his ambition, but he assured himself that she would make a nice inexpensive wife—as though there were any inexpensive wives.

He had never dreamed of friendship with his employer's daughters, who lived on a plane far above his, but now—who knows?

So he was disloyal to Nora in his thoughts, despite her propinquity in the cab and the subtle scent of Nuit de Noel which she gave forth. Nora used very expensive perfume, but very little of it, and that trifle, blending with her own natural fragrance, was intoxicating.

Nora was lovely, he thought, but Hilda Brinker was exquisite and would be worth millions when her father died. A young man could make his own way in the world by diligence, but he would go up much quicker if he married a wealthy girl.

After all, he had not been accepted by Nora. He had proposed, but she had kept him dangling; if she lost him it was her own fault, and he was not to blame for bettering himself.

Rather a mean young man, you may be thinking. Perhaps. It is such men as these who rise in the world and

form our class of self-made millionaires, which explains why millionaires are not usually very winsome.

Nora would have laughed joyously if she could have read his thoughts, but Nora was not thinking about him at all; she never did, and to-night she had important matters to consider.

"Wait in the cab," she commanded, when they reached the Brinker house.

She was out of the vehicle before he had time to offer his assistance, and running up the steps. The door opened before she reached it, and Hilda emerged, closing the big portal softly behind her.

"I sneaked out," she laughed. "Fran doesn't know I'm coming with you. Fran is very nice, Miss Meagher, but she isn't fond of Arthur Colter, and I am, only I don't want him to know it."

"I picked up an escort for us," explained Nora, as they approached the cab. "Randolph Milligan. You know him?"

"I don't think so."

"Why, he's your father's secretary."

"That prune!" sniffed Hilda. Nora giggled. Ranny saw them coming, and was out on the sidewalk.

"How do you do, Mr. Milligan?" said Hilda sweetly.

Ranny bowed. "Delighted to be of service," he declared.

"Good boy, Chesterfield," murmured Nora.

He gave his hand to each of the girls as they stepped into the cab.

"What shall I tell the driver, Miss Brinker?"

"Tell him, please, to go to police headquarters."

Ranny's jaw dropped.

"Really," he protested, "I must tell him something."

"Tell him police headquarters in a hurry," Nora instructed. "Then jump in here and don't delay us."

Apprehension was stealing over Ranny, but he mumbled the address and entered the cab.

"May I ask why you young ladies wish to go to police headquarters?" he inquired.

"It's like this," Nora began. "Two friends of ours have disappeared from their homes and we want the police to find them."

"Indeed. May I ask the young ladies' names?"

It was Hilda's turn to giggle. "Arthur Colter and Lester Lucus," she stated.

"Young men! But do you think it is seemly. Surely their male relatives—"

Nora interrupted: "We know what we are about, Ranny. All you have to do is to be our silent escort."

"Lester Lucus," he repeated. "Nora, surely that isn't—"

"Yep. You met him at my house. He runs a hot-dog stand," declared Nora, whose eyes were mirthful. Teasing Ranny was a respite from anxiety.

Mr. Milligan was so shocked he was unable to speak for a moment. The girls were whispering together.

"Miss Brinker," he began uneasily, "I ought to tell you that this Lucus person annoyed your father greatly. I am sure he would not like to have you appear at a police station inquiring for him."

"I am not afraid of father. Undoubtedly he will be furious," said Hilda.

A chill was stealing over Ranny. When Mr. Brinker was furious he took it out on somebody, usually his secretary. If Ludwig learned that he had escorted Hilda to police headquarters to make inquiries for a hot-dog man, his wrath would be appalling. Ranny might lose his job. Oh, this was a dreadful situation, and Nora had dragged him into it.

"I am employed by Mr. Brinker, as you know," he stated stiffly. "I do not wish to be a party to this affair."

"Stop the cab and get out," snapped Hilda. "We don't need you. Why did you bring him, Miss Meagher?"

"I thought a man would be useful."

"Can't I induce you to return to your home, Miss Brinker?"

"Not to-night," said Hilda coolly.

"Nora, you understand my position."

"Yes," said Nora. "You have cold feet."

"It was very unfair. What is your interest in this Lucus fellow, Nora?"

"I often ask myself that," she replied. "Don't worry, Ranny. We won't tell Mr. Brinker on you."

"I think Mr. Milligan desires to leave us," said Hilda. "We do not wish to detain him against his will."

"You wouldn't desert two young girls on their way to police headquarters, Ranny?" reproached Nora. "If you like you can remain in the cab. I'll do all the talking. I don't want Miss Brinker's name mentioned anyway. It won't be necessary."

During this argument the cab was hurtling down town through deserted streets, and now drew up before the building which housed the commissioner and deputies of the New York police force.

No matter how sweet and kind a girl may be, she can be very cruel to a suitor whom she doesn't favor, and Nora was so wrapped up in her own affairs that she had not considered that she was risking the position of a worthy young man by dragging him into those affairs. Reluctantly Ranny opened the cab door and, when the girls had alighted, followed them into the building.

Nora spied a policeman behind a desk and made inquiries, to be directed to the Bureau of Missing Persons down a side corridor. This office was vacant save for a sergeant who had his feet on the desk, his coat off, and was reading the sporting columns of an evening newspaper. The entrance of two extremely pretty, well-dressed girls embarrassed him greatly, but he thrust his arms into his uniform jacket and assumed an official manner.

"We want the police to find two young men who have been missing three days," began Nora.

The officer drew toward him a blank and dipped a pen in ink.

"Names and addresses?" he demanded.

Nora supplied Lester's address, and Hilda furnished the street and number of Colter's hotel.

"Occupations?" he demanded.

"They are in business at—Broadway near Fulton."

"What kind of business?"

Nora flushed. "They run a—it's a kind of a—"

"It's a frankfurter stand," supplied Mr. Milligan. Both girls glared at him, yet he had spoken the truth.

The sergeant's manner from polite interest changed to indifference.

"Descriptions, please?" he demanded. The girls were able to give him excellent descriptions, much more accurate and in fuller detail than a man could have done.

"Distinguishing marks? Birth marks, moles on the body?"

Nora looked at Hilda and Hilda looked at Nora. Both blushed.

"I am afraid we can't tell you that; we don't know," Hilda faltered.

"Why? Ain't you ladies their wives or sisters or something?"

Nora shook her head blushing very red. "We are not relatives. Just friends."

"Ah! Sweethearts, perhaps?"

"No, just friends."

The officer hid a smile beneath his heavy gray mustache.

"What do their relations think of this?"

"So far as we know they have no relatives in New York."

"Both bachelors?"

Nora nodded.

"These lads didn't show up for a date; so you came for the police," he surmised. "Why are a couple of nice girls like you going around with fellers that run a hot-dog stand? You

ought to do better than that. They's a lot of nice boys on the police force, girls."

Hilda hurled a dangerous glance at him, but the sergeant was being amused at his own wit and did not see it.

"These are our reasons for assuming they are being detained somewhere against their will," said Nora coldly. She told him that they had left their living quarters without warning or without removing luggage, that their stand was in possession of two men who looked untrustworthy, and she knew positively that they had no intention of leaving their place of business at this time.

"I have information that those two men are criminals," she declared. "Mr. Lucus was warned against one of them."

"Where did you get the information?"

"From a man—well—I suppose he is a tramp; he said his name was Downing. He was—well, very ragged."

"A tramp," said the sergeant. "Well, we'll look into it, miss. What's your name?"

"Nora Meagher." Nora gave her home and office address, and telephone number.

"And the other young lady?"

"I really don't think it's necessary," interposed Randolph. "Won't one informant do?"

"Oh, I guess so. What's your name and address?" he demanded of Milligan, who supplied it.

"And now what are you going to do?" demanded Nora.

"Why—er—look into it."

"How will you look into it?" she insisted.

"Well, we'll check up on your information. These fellers may have lit out of town for some reason you girls don't know anything about. You ain't married to them, you know. They don't have to account to you."

"But how will you go about finding them?"

The sergeant sighed; women were so annoying. "Well, in the morning we'll grab these fellers at the frankfurter stand and find out what they know."

"Why not do it now?" demanded Nora.

"Because it's locked up for the night and the men that work there are gone home, and there are seven million people in New York."

"But suppose something happens to them to-night?" Nora wailed.

"Then they're out of luck, lady. You ain't given us much information. You haven't got any real reason to suppose they met with foul play. Who the deuce wants to kidnap a couple of hot-dog men?"

Hilda took the floor. "Sergeant," she said, "my father is Ludwig Brinker. I believe he is a captain of police reserves. These two boys are both college men, and they have twenty thousand dollars cash; so do not dismiss them as not worth consideration."

"Say," admired the sergeant, "that's different. I know the old sausage king. We did some kind of favor for him last week. I wasn't on duty; so I don't know what it was. Did these gents have the twenty thousand dollars on their persons?"

"No, it was in the name of the corporation they have formed, and in a bank."

"Hum. They wouldn't have run away with that coin now, would they?"

"Hardly," she said scornfully. "It was their own money."

"Well, well. We'll get on the job, though I don't see that we can do anything till morning. I'll have a man on hand when the stand opens up, nab these fellers in charge, and give them the works. Give your father my regards, miss. He supplies all the hot dogs free of charge for our annual field day."

Hilda dimpled. It always amused her to hear Comets termed "hot dogs."

"I'm sure we are grateful, Sergeant —er—"

"Hogan, Miss Brinker."

He escorted them personally to their taxicab. "Where shall I direct the chauffeur?" he demanded.

"Tell him to go over to Broadway first," said Nora.

"It's out of our way." From Ranny.

"I'd sort of like to drive by the stand," explained Nora.

"For Heaven's sake," he protested, "you heard what the sergeant said."

"If you don't mind, Mr. Milligan," said Hilda with ice water in her voice. He subsided.

In most American cities, "down town" is a region of stores and office buildings and theaters and cafés. It is busy during daylight hours and animated by night. Down town New York at night is a ghost city, a place of silence and shadows, as uninhabited as the remote fastnesses of the Rockies; a region of deep cañons, the street lights of which struggle pitifully against the shadows cast by the high and massive skyscrapers.

A stranger who landed from an airplane in down town New York, assuming this were possible, might wander for hours in search of signs of life, and he would have to walk miles northward to reach the first brightly lighted ice cream parlor or movie palace in the vicinity of Fourteenth Street.

Policemen who are assigned to patrol the down town district sometimes go mad if they are socially inclined, for they rarely see even a building watchman, though every building has at least one who is kept busy all night moving from floor to floor and pulling clock boxes to prove that he is not fast asleep somewhere.

It was through this sinister and silent city that the taxicab rattled over the pavements, waking echoes and possibly annoying the dead in the ancient graveyards which are tucked here and there between high buildings.

They passed St. Paul's, and Hilda gave an exclamation. "I never noticed before that the top of the spire of St. Paul's is only as third as high as some of the buildings around it."

"There's the stand!" exclaimed Nora. "It's all dark."

"For pity's sake, what did you expect?" demanded Milligan testily.

The taxi darted past the establishment of Lester and Chipmunk, and continued down townward.

"Turn around and go uptown," Nora instructed the chauffeur, who swung his machine about obediently and moved north.

"Go very slowly," she commanded.

For the second time they passed the frankfurter stand, and there fell upon their ears a dull heavy detonation, like the boom of a distant cannon.

Nora grasped Ranny tightly by the wrist.

"What was that? It came from that building?"

"Ouch. Subway blasting."

"I thought it came from the other side of the street," said Hilda.

"Stop the cab!" exclaimed Nora. "I'm going to investigate."

"Don't be absurd," Milligan protested. "The building is dark and locked. We'll tell a policeman."

"Let me out," cried the girl hysterically.

"Wait," pleaded Hilda. "We'll find an officer and go back. I don't think it came from that side of the street at all."

"It was under ground," insisted Ranny. "But we'll pick up a policeman. You girls are going to get yourselves into the papers."

"What do I care? Suppose those men have Les in that place. Suppose they are killing him."

Ranny laughed. "It's not big enough for much action. Drive on, chauffeur, until you see a policeman."

"What do you think was the cause of that noise?" Nora demanded of the chauffeur.

"I didn't hear any noise," replied the driver surprisingly. "What do you want a cop for?"

"Never mind," Hilda ordered. "You keep your eyes open for a uniform."

Nora still protesting, they drove north looking for an officer, and traveled a mile before they saw one. He argued that he could not go off his beat, but agreed to ride with them until they picked up the patrolman who covered the district in which they claimed the explosion had occurred. All this occupied five or six minutes, but finally the cab was turned around and headed back for the frankfurter stand.

CHAPTER XVII.

TWO MEN IN A BOAT.

"SIT still and don't make any fuss," commanded the man with the gun.

Lester Lucus obeyed, and when Chipmunk showed signs of irrupting he kicked him in the shins. Lester had lived some twenty-seven years or so without meeting a lethal weapon which was pointed in his direction.

He had been too young to participate in the Great War and he had, until recently, taken tales of brigandage with a grain of salt. This, however, was the second occasion within a few weeks when he had looked into the business end of a revolver; so, compared to Colter, he had experience.

The cab rumbled over the bridge and there was silence for a moment. Both the men upon the folding seats glared at them grimly, the second man looking as if he would also produce a weapon in jig time should occasion require it.

"We won't make a fuss," Lester said quietly after the painful silence. "I see you are not officers after all."

The unpleasant face of the man with the gun twisted into a disagreeable grin.

"Yer a good guesser, kid."

"Why pick on a couple of poor frankfurter men?" he ventured. "Or if you want to hold us up, why not do it? We don't want a ride."

"And I always did hate Brooklyn," said the irrepressible Colter.

"Shut yer face," commanded the gunman.

More silence. Somebody said once that when several people are together and a silence falls it is possible to hear the flapping of the wings of angels. All they heard was the rumble of trains, the rattle of automobiles, and the toot-toot-toot of a tug with a tow which was passing under the bridge and notifying all and sundry that it had three barges in its string.

By and by they were over the bridge and moving through traffic in Brooklyn, and by this time, it was quite dark.

The strange thing about Brooklyn is that nobody knows it very well. Hundreds of thousands of persons reside in the suburbs of that vast settlement, journey daily to and from New York for years, and are familiar only with the view from the elevated trains. Hundreds of thousands more never see down town Brooklyn at all because their movements New Yorkward are always underground.

Persons in business in one neighborhood get lost when they turn a corner, and a person who wishes to hide where nobody would ever find him could do no better than take a room in a house on one of those mean side streets within a mile of the terminus of the bridge.

Les tried to guess their route by looking out of the window, but in two or three minutes he was in foreign territory so far as his knowledge of the borough was concerned; so, when one of the bandits pulled down the curtains of the taxi, he didn't hamper the young man much.

"Say," pleaded Chipmunk, "what's this all about? Be good fellows and tip us off. Why are you taking us sightseeing with the curtains pulled down? Are you going to hold us for ransom?

Everybody who knows me would give three rousing cheers if I never come back. Les, here, is even more unpopular than I am. Besides I'm getting hungry."

They heard one of their captors chuckle.

"Nothing is going to happen to you guys much," came out of the darkness. "You're just goin' visiting for a few days."

"Great!" exclaimed the irrepressible. "I certainly do love to visit. Will there be any girls there?"

"You're too fresh," growled the other unseen guardsman. "If you fellers do what yer told and don't try any funny business, maybe you can go back to sellin' 'dogs' some day. But we ain't giving you any information, and we'd just as soon plug yo' as not. Hey, Bill?"

"Sure. Sooner," said the other cheerfully.

"Listen," began Les persuasively, "we're a couple of poor young fellows and not worth the taxi fare for this journey. Not having anything to lose by doing what you tell us, we have nothing to gain by making trouble. So why all the mystery? What do you want of us anyway?"

"That's the way to talk," said the fellow opposite him. "You'd be a couple of chumps to start anything, and you'd land in the river. Just play dead and you may come to life again some day."

Now the taxi was bumping over a rough road. Cobbles by the feel, thought Les, which meant that they were down in the region of heavy trucks, either in the factory district or near the docks.

A matter of ten minutes, and the machine finally stopped with a jerk.

One of the two captors opened a door and backed out, drawing a gun as he did so.

"Come out, you fellers," he commanded. Les descended first and looked around. The cab had turned off its lights and stood in a black shadow cast by a warehouse building, but Les got a glimpse of cranes, derricks, a high bridge in the distance, and the lights, red, green, and yellow of various craft in the harbor. They were on a dock.

The second man now emerged from the interior of the taxi.

"You go ahead, Bill," he suggested. "I'll follow these birds and keep them covered."

Bill opened a small door in the building and stepped within. It was a vast interior lighted by a few electric bulbs at intervals of a couple of hundred feet, lights which winked in discouragement and seemed to make the darkness more dense. Les made out a hump in the middle of the floor which, as his eyes grew accustomed to the murk, he realized was a string of freight cars.

"There should be watchmen," he thought, "but of course they are in with these fellows or they would not bring us here."

"Come on. Step on it," commanded the man behind; accordingly they moved slowly after their guide. After a walk of a couple of hundred yards, so it seemed, they passed through a sliding door out upon the lip of the pier and confronted the bulk of a vessel. By her two stumpy masts, and absence of a funnel and deckhouse at the stern, Les recognized her as a barge, most likely an oil barge.

She was high-sided, which meant that she was empty, and he saw that she was of steel. Following their captor they moved alongside the vessel until they came to a gangway set at a steep angle against the ship's side.

"Oh," exclaimed Chipmunk, "we're going yachting!"

"Shut up, you son of a sea cook," snarled the man in front. "Not a word out of either of you. Climb now, and no noise."

With some difficulty they went up the steel ladder and landed on a steel deck, lighted only by two electric lamps

at the masts. A man was coming down the deck with the wide stride of a seafarer. It was too dark to distinguish him, but Les made out that he had whiskers, wore overalls, and an ancient yachting cap.

"Here we are, captain," said the first of their captors.

"These are the bimbos?" queried the man with a mean laugh. "Bring them along."

He turned and led the way aft, walking upon a narrow bridge which was built over the rows of oil tanks. The others followed, holding to a light steel handrail.

Presently they arrived at the deck house; the captain jerked open a door and motioned them inside. They found themselves in a room about twenty feet square, a dining table with six revolving chairs occupying part of the space alongside a buffet, containing a dish of fruit, and a couple of big leather chairs which looked comfortable. The salon was clean, its steel walls white enameled.

"It might be worse," whispered Chipmunk.

But worse was to come. The captain opened a door at the far end of the cabin, revealing a narrow steel staircase, and motioned to them to descend.

"Look here, captain," cried Arthur, "these men have made us prisoners and brought us here at the point of a gun. You're going to get yourself into a peck of trouble—"

"Get below," roared the captain, and his face was so menacing in the comparatively bright light of the cabin that the prisoners did not stop to protest further. They descended hastily and found themselves in a small room about eight feet by twelve which contained a double berth, a couple of camp stools, and nothing more.

A single electric bulb hung from a wire in the center of the room. There was no porthole, but a small square grille high in the after wall which evidently provided some kind of ventilation.

Crash. It was the steel door at the head of the ladder which had closed with a bang.

The two young men regarded each other for a moment. "Well," sighed Chipmunk, "this ought to hold us."

Lester dropped upon one of the camp stools and buried his face in his hands.

"Cheer up. Maybe the ship won't sink," said Arthur, laying an encouraging hand upon the shoulder of his friend.

Les looked up. "I'm just trying to think," he explained. "What on earth is this all about? Why should they go to so much trouble to get us into a place like this? They haven't even robbed us. We might be armed for all they know, and we have money."

"I suppose that will come later. They are under the impression that you are John Jacob Asterbilt and I am Cornelius Vanderpool, and when they find out the truth they'll apologize to us."

"Don't try to be funny. They know who we are. They grabbed us as we were closing up the frankfurter stand."

Colter was wandering around the room. He thumped on the walls and tried to look into the ventilator.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PENNYWEIGHT OF PLATINUM.

"IT'S a mighty tight little jail," he opined. "I wonder if the idea is to give us a sea voyage. I bet you could get beautifully seasick in this hole. It's what they use for a dungeon, I suppose. Very pretty, I say."

"The ingeniousness of it!" exclaimed Les. "Even the police would not think of looking on board an oil barge for persons who disappeared in New York. If we only could surmise what they have gone to all this trouble for."

"When do we eat?" demanded Chipmunk. "It's past my dinner time, and my tummy is making a disturbance about it. Did you get a good look at that skipper? What a sweet, jolly jack tar he is. Nails for breakfast every morning, and for lunch he eats lobster shells. An appeal to his better nature would be fruitless, I ween."

Lester got up from his chair and moved restlessly round. "A steel door, no windows, steel floor and walls," he stated. "Old Houdini could never get out of this. We're here as long as they need us. Arthur, try to dope out what they want us for?"

"My head aches now. I bet that ventilator isn't working. Say, I had a date with Hilda Brinker. This is an outrage!"

Despite himself Les chuckled. "She'll forgive you when she learns the facts. I had an engagement with Nora myself."

"That's the girl you won't introduce me to. You'll have to now, to add verisimilitude to a bald and unconvincing narrative."

Les groaned. "I wonder if I'll ever see poor little Nora again? If we were not so completely in the dark. Arthur, do you realize that neither of us has a family to worry about us. If we don't keep our engagements the girls will just suppose we have got tired of them, and they will dismiss us from their minds."

"Old Ludwig Brinker won't lose any sleep if I stop calling on Hilda," said Colter. "He doesn't admire me much. And the police won't get excited if a couple of hot-dog men vanish off the face of the earth. Les, if we get out of here it will be because we've rescued ourselves. Nobody will look for us.

"Now, if we were married, our wives would be calling the hospitals if we were half an hour late for dinner. A man ought to be married, Les. He owes it to himself in case of accidents like this. My Lord, I'm hungry. I'm so hungry I could eat what they probably serve on this bad-smelling tub. Have you noticed the aroma of oil?"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to find out how we stand here," Les declared. "I'm going up and pound on the door to see what happens."

He ascended the stairs and began to batter with his fist against the steel panel of the door. It gave off a resounding clang.

"Not very thick steel plates," commented Colter from below. "I'll be hungry enough pretty soon to bite through them."

After a few minutes he heard footsteps in the cabin, and then a harsh voice close to the door:

"Get down that ladder and stay below if you want grub."

"Yes, sir," cried Les, who went down the ladder making all the noise he could.

They heard the door open and something was laid on the steps, then the door closed.

Chipmunk beat him to the ladder, and came down bearing a tin dipper in each hand.

"Some kind of stew," he stated. "Looks awful. I don't dare smell it."

"No knives or forks or spoons. Are we supposed to drink it?"

Arthur set the dippers on the floor and gazed at them mournfully.

"Superiority of mind over matter," he remarked. "I'm not as hungry as I was."

The two pots of stew gave forth a thin wisp of steam.

"We know they do not intend to starve us to death," Lester said. "And I suppose that stuff will taste worse when it is cold than it does now. What do you guess it is?"

"Don't ask," warned Colter who lifted one dipper to his mouth. "It's nasty and greasy, but I think it is mutton stew."

A stew is both the most difficult and the easiest dish to concoct; a cordon bleu can make of it something notable;

yet the bad chef does not hesitate to essay it, and the steward of the anonymous oil barge was not a cordon bleu.

With much gagging the prisoners managed to consume a portion of the mess, which seemed to have been composed of whatever happened to be lying around the ship's galley, and managed to take the edge off their appetites.

"Now for a pleasant evening at home," grimaced Chipmunk when they had set the dippers down. "Will you have something on the radio or do you prefer a phonograph record?"

"Oh, dry up," growled his friend. "There is a time for airy chatter, and a time for serious thinking. How are we going to get out of here?"

"That's an easy rebus. We aren't going to get out. Considering that this is the first time I've been locked up, they ought to have started me on an easier jail.

"We can't saw the bars on the window because there isn't a window; so, of course, there are no bars. We can't overpower the simple jailer who brings in our grub, because he just opens the door, sets it on the top step, and locks the door before we can get at him. This is against all the rules."

"What rules?"

"The rules for imprisoning innocent men. There is always a way of escape."

"Oh, dry up," pleaded Les.

"Maybe you'd prefer solitary confinement," Arthur sniffed.

"Locking a fellow up with a funny man comes under the head of cruel and unusual punishment."

"All right, Groucho."

Chipmunk squatted on a campstool, and for awhile he was silent. Then he began to empty his pockets, drew out his half of the day's receipts, kissed it ostentatiously, and thrust it back in his trousers. Presently he reached his vest pockets and produced a tiny silver ball.

"What the deuce—oh, yes. Say, Les. What would you say this was?"

"How do I know?" snapped Lester whose humor was still bad.

"You'd never imagine that molecule was worth a couple of dollars."

"I would not."

"It is. That, young man, is a piece of platinum."

"Platinum? Where did you get it?"

"Found it on our counter. Can't imagine how it came there."

"Let's see it." Lester took it between thumb and forefinger and examined it.

"How do you know it's platinum?" he demanded.

"The agent of the building saw it on the counter. He recognized it because there's a platinum jewelry manufacturer in the building, so he told me, on the second floor, right over us."

"Yes?" Lester was indifferent; but suddenly his eyes gleamed, and he struck his thigh a resounding whack.

"By heavens!" he exclaimed. "I'll bet. So that's it."

"He talks riddles," complained Chipmunk.

But Lester was excited.

"You remember that fellow who asked us about our lease last Saturday night? We didn't have one, but we didn't tell him. I told you, or maybe I forgot to, that after you left and I was locking up, a tramp I happen to know tipped me off that the man was a crook, one of a quartet who were plotting something. The hobo blundered in on them and got beaten up."

"What of it?"

"This morning somebody tried to lease the place over our heads and would have done it if the agent hadn't been a square shooter. He was a hard-looking ticket! I bet he was a crook."

"So was Jesse James. What of it?"

"Those fellows want our place very badly. Why?"

"I was never any good on intelligence tests," complained Colter.

"Chipmunk, I know why we were kidnaped."

"Well, tell papa."

"They were unable to get possession of our stand legally, and they carried us off so they could grab it illegally. It's not us, but the stand they want."

"I begin to catch a glimmer."

"The platinum jeweler's is right over our heads. These fellows intend to rob the place. They figure on entering from our shop."

Chipmunk was on his feet. "You've hit it!" he exclaimed. "It makes sense. That's why they told us that we could go back to selling frankfurters after awhile. That's why we're locked up. Say, if a piece of this stuff no bigger than a pea is worth a couple of dollars, a ton of it must be worth a million. Holy Moses, we've got the whole plot!"

"You haven't got half of it yet," declared Lester. "They bore a big hole in our ceiling, get in, and crack the safe. The police investigate and find that they entered from the frankfurter stand. The detectives find out that you and I are not the regular run of hot-dog men, we are college graduates, intelligent fellows, at least they'll think so.

"As a matter of fact, we're a couple of saps. And we have disappeared. Naturally they assume we went into the hot-dog business with intent to burglarize the platinum establishment. Do you follow me?"

"I'm ahead of you!" exclaimed Chipmunk. "They assume we are the thieves, and while they are searching for us the real crooks get away with the swag. In a few weeks we may be turned loose, and then the police jump on us. When we tell them we were kidnaped and locked up on an oil barge they'll say what oil barge, and we won't know. They'll railroad us to jail, that's what they'll do."

"You're not so dumb as I thought," said his candid friend. "That is the scheme and it's a corker. These crooks take over our place, nobody notices a hot-dog man, and nobody will know the difference. When they are ready they'll loot the platinum jeweler's and be just as safe as if they were in a church.

"We are the scapegoats. The police will be hot on our trail. Chip, we're in less danger while we're locked up here than if we were free."

"Unless we can get loose in time to break up the game. We've got to get out, Les."

"Of course! How?"

"Well, we've got some money. Maybe we could bribe this captain."

"Oh, they'll go through our clothes pretty soon. And if they don't, this skipper will take our money if he finds out we have any."

"If there was only a porthole we might attract attention."

"There isn't," said Lester grimly. "Just the same we're going to get out. My Lord, we've got to get out!"

"Wait a minute. Suppose this is all poppycock? If they want our joint, why haven't they taken our key away from us?"

"It's an old-fashioned lock. They'll have no trouble getting in. We'll have to try the old-fashioned trick of rushing this door when they open it to give us breakfast in the morning."

"I'm game for anything," Chipmunk said bravely. "We'll probably get filled full of lead, but I'd rather be shot than go to jail."

"This sitting around is horrible," moaned Lester. "If we could only do something."

"If we only had a pack of cards. Say, did you ever play Elimination?"

"That's what they've played on us."

"I mean the game. Suppose you think of something, anything in the world. All you have to tell me is whether it is animal, mineral, or vegetable, and allow me to ask twenty questions. I'll get it, provided you answer truthfully."

"If you could guess how to get out of here!" growled Lester who did not bear imprisonment sweetly. "Do you

suppose I'm going to bother my head with questions about vegetables under the circumstances? Let's see what these bunks are like."

He inspected them. They were steel boxes, each containing a thin mattress and a pair of none too clean blankets.

"Everything on this ship is of steel," he observed. "They take no chances of fire."

"Fire isn't what they have to worry about," Chipmunk said sagely.

"These oil ships don't catch fire, they explode."

"Nonsense."

"I read not long ago about one of them blowing up at a pier over in Jersey. They couldn't even find the pier afterward."

"Upon my word," exclaimed the harried Lester Lucus, "I don't know how I keep my hands off you. What a companion in misfortune you are!"

Chipmunk grinned. "You objected to my comedy, and I thought I'd see how you liked tragedy."

"I would prefer you silent. Let's go to bed."

"It's only half after nine."

"There's nothing else to do except listen to you talk, and I prefer to try to sleep."

"Our aim is to please," said Arthur brightly as he began to undress.

Lester patted him on the back in friendly fashion. "You're all right, old man," he declared. "My nerves are on edge. I can't help thinking about the horrible mess we're in."

"That's all right," laughed the other. "Douse the glim, will you? I can never go to sleep in a lighted room. I hope these bunks have no occupants besides us."

"Good Lord," groaned Lester. "Now you've set me thinking about that. Good night, and don't contribute any more to the evening's entertainment.

Curiously enough they both fell asleep in short order. Many hours later Les opened his eyes to find the room dimly lighted by means of sunlight, which penetrated in some manner through the ventilator grating.

He had slept heavily, dreamlessly, although he had expected at least one nightmare. He lay in the lower bunk, Chipmunk having scrambled without argument into the upper, and for a moment he could not understand why he was lying in such a place.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BLUE OCEAN.

LESTER rubbed his eyes, for the floor was not behaving properly. It was lifting at the opposite side of the room, and he rolled against the wall. Then it reversed the motion, and the wall against which he was lying pushed him away. With an exclamation of astonishment he tumbled out of bed and stood on the heaving deck.

"Wake up, Arthur," he cried. "We're at sea. The ship sailed while we slept."

Chipmunk bounced up in his berth, bumped his head against the roof, and flopped back.

"Ouch," he remarked. "I'll say we're at sea, and the sea is not so polite about it. A sailor's life is the life for me. Yo, heave ho!"

Lester was dressing in great haste.

"What's your hurry?" demanded his friend. "You're not going anywhere."

"We'll get dressed and rush the door when they bring breakfast. Good heavens, Chip, do you realize that we may be out of sight of land?"

"And if we are, a lot of good rushing the door will do us." Chipmunk justified his name by the ease with which he swung to the floor and, despite his protest, was garmented as quickly as Lester.

"Confound it, I wish she'd quit rolling," he complained. "I'm all right at sea if I get plenty of fresh

air, but this hole is dreadful. I wonder where we're bound."

Lester considered. "She was empty when we came aboard and sailed during the night; so she must be going back in ballast to some oil port. Perhaps Galveston, Texas, perhaps Los Angeles. We've been shanghaied, Arthur. It doesn't seem possible in this day and age."

"Well, I don't have to sell hot dogs to-day; that's one consolation. I wonder what Hilda Brinker will say?"

"Frankfurter men loot platinum establishment. Police of four continents waiting to nab them," quoted Lester from a presumptive morning newspaper. "What a neat plot! I was reading somewhere that criminals are persons of low intelligence given to drugs, and incapable of reasoning. We're good for two or three weeks on this hooker, and then they'll kick us ashore penniless, and on the beach will be policemen with our descriptions waiting to nab us."

"We've even got platinum on our person," grinned Chipmunk, holding up the half-pennyweight which had enabled them to build their theory of their incarceration. "But it's easy to get rid of this. I don't suppose anybody would believe our story."

"Not likely."

"Well, shall we rush the door?"

Lester nodded. "We've got to get out of here, whatever happens. We'll wait at the top of the ladder till somebody opens it, and then we'll break out."

They crouched for half an hour on the top step of the steep metal staircase before they heard a key turn in the door. Then it opened wide, and suddenly a hoarse voice shouted:

"Tumble up here, you swabs."

They rose sheepishly from their hams and confronted the whiskered face of the skipper, who looked less villainous by daylight, but who was by no means handsome and good-natured, to judge by appearances.

"So that was your game," he roared. "I've a good mind—come out here."

They entered the cabin, which seemed a palace compared to the dungeon below. The skipper thumped Lester on the hip, and did the same by Arthur Colter.

"Didn't think you had guns, but it's well to make sure," he observed. "Now empty yer pockets out on that table. Come on. Hurry up."

Most reluctantly they turned out their pockets and the small reddish-brown eyes of the skipper brightened at the pile of greenbacks which rolled upon the green baize tablecloth.

"Think of that now. They forgot to frisk ye," he said pleasantly. "This makes it nice."

"You can have that money, captain, if you put us ashore at once," declared Lester.

The skipper's dirty right claw was already transferring the Treasury notes to his pocket.

"I get it anyway," he said with a wide grin. This skipper was a small but stocky man with a grizzled and unkempt whisker. He was wearing a torn brown suit and the old yachting cap they had noted the night before. He was evidently in high fettle at the discovery of the money.

"Sit down, boys, sit down. I'll see you get something to eat presently," he declared. "We got to talk things over."

A wild idea of overpowering him and taking command of the ship entered the brain of Lester Lucus, but the first words of the captain showed him the futility of it.

"I couldn't put ye ashore," he said. "'Cause why? 'Cause this is an oil barge, and we're on the end of a steel cable a couple of hundred yards long. We're the last barge of a tow of three, and we're bound for Galveston."

"How are you going to account for our presence on board?" demanded Lester.

The skipper favored them with a cunning smile.

"I tell ye, lads. It's the hardest thing in the world to get crews for these barges. Seamen won't sail on 'em, and landsmen won't go to sea anyway.

"Just as soon as we tied up in Brooklyn the whole crew deserted, all eight of them, and I put in a call for a new crew with a shipping agent over in New York. We got our men last night. You two fellers was very drunk; so we had to chuck ye in the lazaret."

"Confound you, you know better than that," exclaimed Lester furiously.

The skipper chuckled. "That's my story, and I'll stick to it. You see, we don't need seamen on these barges, just deck swabbers. Any kind of bums will do, and bums are about the only kind we can get."

"You shanghai your crews?" demanded Colter.

"That's a harsh word. What I want to tell yer is this: If you turn to and do your work I'll let you go ashore at Galveston and no questions asked. If you make trouble you go into the brig you just came out of."

"How long will it take us to get to Galveston?" Lester asked.

"Mebbe three weeks, if we're lucky."

"Three weeks!" exclaimed Colter.

"It's astonishing the yarns these deck hands tell," mocked the skipper. "I just don't believe anything; that's the way I am. How do I know who you are. You ain't got any money."

"What do you call what you have pouched?" Les demanded.

"You ain't got any money, and you never had any. You're a couple of bums, and if you don't work you don't eat. I kind of like you boys, though; so I won't work you hard."

He tapped his pocket with satisfaction.

"There ain't no use you telling tales to the other deckhands. Every one of them will have a story of his own. A pack of lies. Want to go out on deck? It's a lovely morning. Nice fresh breeze."

Chipmunk laughed. "You're all right, skipper," he declared. "I love a good rogue. In view of all the money we haven't got, suppose you go easy on us. Just give us our grub and forget to make us swab the decks? Come on. You can afford to be a good fellow."

The captain tapped his pocket again. "Depends on how you behave," he informed them. "I can be a good feller or a tough egg. Go on out on deck and come back here for yer breakfast in half an hour."

Les might have made a rough answer, but Chipmunk twitched his coat sleeve.

"Shut up and come on," he whispered. "Want to go back into your hole?"

They stepped out on deck, and a strong blast of wind struck them in the face. They breathed delightedly and deep. The sea was a deep blue dotted with white foam, the sky overhead was clear and cerulean. The land was a thin brown line upon the horizon at their right.

They stood upon a narrow deck not more than twenty-five feet long. The surrounding deck was like a turtle's back, crossed from stem to stern by a narrow footbridge at each side of the barge, and at the bow was another deckhouse upon which several men were standing.

A hundred yards ahead was another barge, ahead of her another, and in front a powerful ocean tug from whose funnel black smoke was pouring. She must have been a quarter of a mile from the spot on which they stood.

Sometimes they could see the steel cable which connected them to the barge ahead as it grew taut and glittered in the sunlight, and sometimes it sank into the sea. The barge moved steadily, slackened speed, then the line tightened, there was a slight jerk, and she drove onward more rapidly.

"A sailor's life is the life for you," quoted Lester. "You're welcome to it, Chipmunk."

"This is a lot better than being down in that jail," asserted Colter. "We may find a way of getting out of this. Observe, Les; one of our fellow mariners is approaching."

A man came around the corner of the deckhouse with a bucket in his right hand.

His mien was disconsolate, his habiliments were badly torn and incredibly dirty, and he glanced at the pair soddenly until their good clothes impressed themselves upon him, then a gleam of hope entered his bleary eyes.

"Say, gents," he whined, "can ye do somethin' about it? I been shanghaied."

Chipmunk emitted a whoop of amusement, Les grinned, and then he uttered an ejaculation of astonishment. The woebegone mariner was the person whose hot-dog business he had purchased the day before. At the same instant the fellow recognized Lester and dropped his bucket.

"It was a game," he said furiously. "That's why you bought me out."

"Don't be a fool," admonished Les. "How did you get on board this barge? My friend and I are here entirely by chance—on our part."

"It was the money you give me," complained the hot-dog man. "I went out to celebrate. I went down to Third Avenue to a joint I knew where they sell hard stuff, and I got plastered. I woke up this morning on this ship without a nickel in my clothes."

He would have said more, but he was interrupted by the right boot of the skipper, who had come up behind. Impelled by the kick, the man dove forward and landed on his face.

"You get to work," snarled the skipper. "And you fellers ain't allowed to talk to the crew. I'd as leave lock you up again as not."

Lester and his friend exchanged glances and walked to the stern, where they looked with feigned interest at the deep blue sea.

"Queer," whispered Colter. "They nabbed the man from our other stand. Maybe our platinum theory is all wet."

Lester looked thoughtful. "Perhaps, but I don't think so. This was probably a coincidence. I gave the fellow fifty dollars, and he went on a spree with it in some Third Avenue dive. The captain told us that his whole crew was picked up by crimps, and our employee got caught in the dragnet."

"It's funny, though."

"Yes. I'll tell you, Chip, it convinces me that our trust plan, our string of frankfurter stands, was an unsound idea. When all is said and done, we would have to employ men like that—just derelicts, drunkards, stupid and incompetent when not dishonest. Fortunately your money is intact, and when we get ashore we'll invest it in some more practical enterprise."

"Yep. It ought to accumulate a lot of interest while we're in jail."

"We're not going to be in jail. In some way we'll get out of this. We'll get ashore if we have to swim."

"Just a lot of words. We're thirty miles from land."

"Something will happen to help us," Lester assured him with a confidence he did not really feel.

They breakfasted on oatmeal, they lunched on canned corned beef, and they spent the afternoon on the deck of the barge in a condition of mingled boredom and distress. Late in the afternoon banks of clouds hid the sun, and the sea, which had been perturbed, grew more calm.

"Fog coming up," the skipper informed them. "I'd sooner have a storm than fog in these waters."

"I prefer the fog," stated Chipmunk. "It's easier on the stomach."

The captain grinned.

"That's all you know about it," he said ominously.

The fog came in from the east, wisps

of mist at first, then damp and heavy, hanging like white curtains around the barge. In an hour it was impossible to see the barge directly ahead, but they heard the boom of the horn upon the tug, and the shriller whistles of the other tows

CHAPTER XX.

TWO MEN OVERBOARD.

SUPPER consisted of the abominable stew of the night before, but they ate it at the table in the saloon from soup plates and in company of the captain.

"I thought the skipper stayed on the bridge during a fog," said Chipmunk.

"So he does if it's a ship," replied the captain. "This is a barge. There ain't nothing I can do. I keep the lights burning bright, and the horn going, but the other feller has to look out for us; we're helpless."

"That's a nice lookout," murmured Chipmunk.

"Were you ever in a collision?" Les asked.

The man nodded. "Was on a barge that got cut in two by a liner. Their boats picked us up. It was a bright night, too, and no excuse for not seeing us, but I guess the officer on the bridge was full of hop."

"Nice lookout," Chip repeated.

"The tug toots three times, telling ships to watch for a tow of three barges. Mostly there ain't any accidents. You fellers want to sleep down below to-night? Them berths are better than the crew's quarters forward."

"Yes, thanks," said Les. "But we would like to stay up until we are sleepy."

"It's all right with me," agreed the skipper. "So long as you don't try to make trouble I'll treat ye right."

"You're a regular guy," grinned Chipmunk ingratiatingly.

"Sure that's me, Captain Jim Wilkins. Treat me right, and I'll treat you right."

"What's the name of this barge, captain?" asked Les casually. He had not discovered the name of the craft, though he had looked about him.

"No name. Just a number. Barge 314, Golden Oil Company. I call her Geranium, 'cause she smells so sweet. Don't mind tellin' yer, because you can't do nothing about it."

The skipper finished his supper, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, went into his cabin, and returned wearing a sou'west coat and a rubber cap, nodded to his guests, and went out on deck. After a little while they followed him.

Neither had an overcoat, and the fog was almost as damp as rain. They could make the skipper out dimly, standing at his station on top of the deckhouse. Every half minute the fog horn moaned from the bow. The more powerful blast of the steam whistle of the tug usually drowned it out.

The two youths thrust their hands in their trousers pockets and turned up their collars.

"A little of this is enough," Lester observed. "Let's get back in the cabin, it's warm anyway."

"I call this an adventure," protested Arthur. "We're cold because we're standing still. Let's walk up to the bow along that footbridge. It ought to be an experience."

He felt his way to the narrow passageway, followed by Lester, and they ventured forth. The fog was so thick that the captain was not aware they had gone exploring, in fact they could not see an arm's length ahead of them.

The barge was about three hundred feet long, but the journey from stern to stem seemed to be a quarter of a mile.

They grew colder and more wet and less interested in their goal as they progressed, but they persevered and

finally set foot upon the forward deck.

They dimly distinguished two or three figures, one of whom stood beside a big box and turned a crank like the crank of a hand organ. From the box came doleful wails. It was the fog horn, operated by hand. They drew close to this apparatus and questioned the musician about it.

"We got a motor horn," he informed them, "but it got out of order. This darn thing makes noise enough, I'll say."

"You're right," agreed Chipmunk, as the machine gave an eerie shriek. "Let's go back, Les."

"Wait a minute," Les replied. "I thought I saw a light, right over there. Coming this way. Look."

He pointed off the port quarter. Chipmunk glimpsed a green flicker for a moment, which immediately vanished.

A hail came down from the lookout perched invisibly on the squat mast just aft of them, and a shout from the man at the bow. Out of the fog floated a hoarse blast and the shriek of a steam siren.

Both youths moved to the port rail and craned their necks and strained their eyes, but could see nothing, and then it seemed as if the ship was violently jerked away from them, so suddenly and with such force that Chipmunk went head foremost over the rail.

With a gasp of horror Les grasped at a flying leg, leaning far over, then came a second jerk less violent than the first; he was off his balance, the weight of Arthur Colter finished the job, he toppled overboard and struck the water a second after his friend had gone silently beneath the surface.

The catastrophe happened so astonishingly that neither made an outcry as the cold water engulfed them.

Les came to the surface spluttering, to see Arthur's head bobbing two feet away.

"Help!" Colter was bellowing. "Help! Man overboard!" His voice sounded strangely weak to Lucus, who joined him in his shrieks, and swam to his side. Both men were good swimmers, but the water was not warm, and they were hampered by their coats and shoes; their only hope was rapid rescue.

There were other noises in the fog. The horn of the steamer was roaring, faint cries came from the barge, and the man with the hand horn was blatting continuously.

"We might as well shut up," Les said with surprising calm. "They can't hear us in that racket. Try to get your shoes off, Chip, and I'll help you get out of your coat. You do the same for me."

"Help!" cried Colter, one last despairing yell. "My Lord, they're leaving us!"

The barge, which had been looming over them, was drawing away; in a few seconds they lost sight of her hull, and then her lights vanished. The steamer stopped blowing her horn. Of her they never had a sight.

"What do you suppose happened?" Arthur gasped as Les, treading water, dragged the water-soaked coat from his shoulders.

"Tread water, don't try to swim," said his friend. "Can you get your shoes off?"

He supported Colter's shoulders while the latter tugged at his shoes and finally managed to kick them off, then Arthur performed the same service for him.

"Float. Take it easy," Les advised. "If we're going to be picked up, this is as good a place as any."

"The water isn't so cold now. How good a swimmer are you, Les?"

"I think I can keep afloat quite awhile."

"Swimming is the best thing I do," Arthur declared. "We must move a little or get chilled. What on earth happened?"

"My guess is that the steamer struck the tow rope, not hard enough to break that steel cable, but enough to jerk the bow of the barge around and dump us overboard. In the excitement nobody saw us. We had no business on the bow anyway."

"That skipper won't care what happens to us. Do you suppose we're going to die, Les?"

"We're not dead yet," said his friend grimly. "Don't talk much. Save your breath."

For awhile they were silent, moving legs and arms gently, floating much, although the water was a trifle rough for comfortable floating.

"I see the stars," Chipmunk, lying on his back, said suddenly.

"Yes, and I see ship's lights. The fog has lifted. That's a break for us."

"See the barges?"

"Yes, over there. They're a couple of miles away, by the look of them. And there's the steamer that did the damage. She's farther away. I see a lighthouse, a revolving light, but it's very dim. It must be ten or twelve miles off."

"We could never swim that far," sighed Arthur.

"Not a chance. Probably currents would carry us away from it."

"If we could float until daylight we might have a chance. Nobody could see us in the dark."

Les made a mental calculation. Dawn was six or seven hours off; it was possible they might last until then, but he doubted it. However, he said nothing. Doubtless Colter knew.

Silence for a time.

"It's awful to die like this," Arthur said, a break in his voice. "Nobody will ever know what became of us. I wonder if Hilda will care."

"Did you ever say anything to her?"

"No-o, but I think she knew the way I felt."

"She's a fine girl," Les sighed. "I have nobody, unless Nora—I never said anything to her either. We always kidded together, but I guess I was getting very fond of that little girl. She was such a good sport!"

"To think they'll never know what became of us! Look, Les, there's a searchlight. It's gone."

A flash had swept the sea a couple of miles away and instantly vanished.

"I didn't see it. Where was it?"

Arthur pointed, and they stared intently, but the light did not appear again.

Several minutes passed.

"I hear a motor, but can't see anything," Les cried excitedly. "Listen!"

They strained their ears. The *puff-puff-puff* of a motor was distinct and seemed to be growing louder.

"It's coming this way," Les exclaimed. "Be ready to yell your lungs out. Strange we can't see its lights."

Now the sound of a powerful gas engine was very distinct.

"It's a rum runner," Chipmunk said bitterly. "They'll never pay any attention to us."

"Sssh. I see her. Look!"

They could make out a moving shape coming directly toward them, a low, black object on the black sea, which was leaving a white streak in its wake.

"Rum runner all right. In a minute they'll pass," Les declared. "We'll yell anyway. Wait till I give the word."

The thing was close at hand—a long, low, black motor boat driving through the water at terrific speed, and without lights.

It was less than a hundred yards away.

"Now!" cried Les.

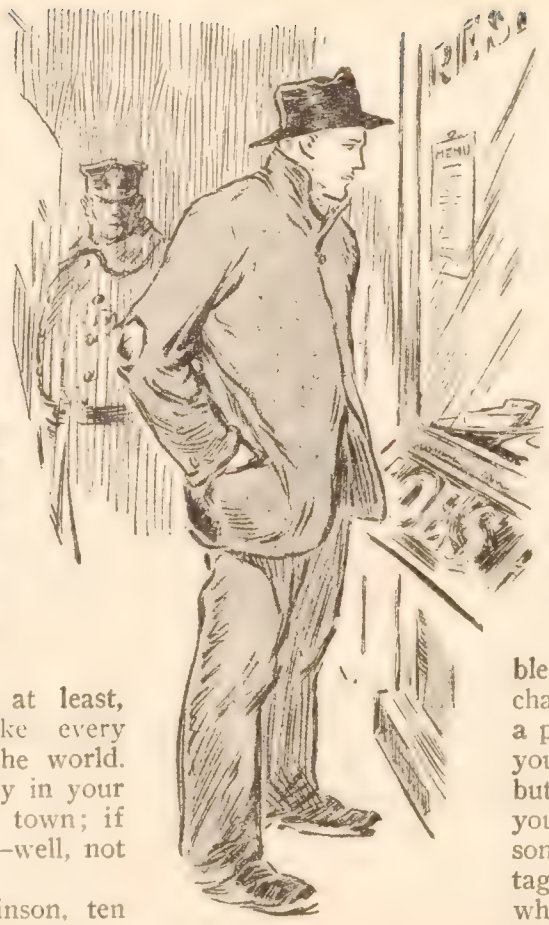
Both men opened their eyes wide and uttered shrieks that were inspired by the energy of despair. Whizz! The thing went by without slackening speed!

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

Bum Pro Tem

By
ALBERT CHENICEK

What to do when you suddenly find yourself minus your money in a big city a long way from home and friends



IN one respect at least, Chicago is like every other city in the world. If you have money in your pocket, it's a fine town; if you're broke, it's—well, not so good.

To Walt Wilkinson, ten hours after his arrival from Bridge Point, Missouri, Chicago was a hell of a place. So, at any rate, he told himself as he stood on the corner of Madison and Halstead Streets and shivered in the bitter-cold wind of late March.

Walt had left the train with apparel of sufficient variety to protect him against any kind of weather, but now he wore no overcoat, nor even a topcoat, and the cheap, frayed, baggy suit that covered his solid frame was totally unlike the natty outfit with which he had been clad when he emerged from the railroad station at ten o'clock the evening before. Also—cold, uncomfortable fact!—his pockets now contained not a single, solitary dime, whereas he had arrived with three hundred dollars.

In the short space of a few hours he had been "done"—completely and beautifully. And there wasn't a thing he could do about it.

Ed Agar, back in Bridge Point, had given him some advice that sounded good at the time.

"Listen, Walt," Ed said, "Chi's no place for a man who doesn't know how to keep a weather eye out for trouble. Don't take any chances. You'll have a peach of a time if you do as I tell you, but if you don't you'll be 'it' in somebody's game of tag before you know what's going on. Don't ask strangers for advice. When your train gets in, take a taxi to a hotel—the Lochinvar is good—and don't climb into the first cab you see at the station. There are a lot of pirates chauffeuring hacks around, and if one of them gets you, good night! Pick out a lemon cab and you won't need to worry."

There was a lot more of the same, ending up with: "Walt, why don't you wait a day longer? I'm going to Chi on a business trip to-morrow. I want to place some orders, and collect some jack the wife's brother says he's ready to pay back, and then when that's done I'll be free. I can show you the ropes, and boy, we'll have a time! What say?"

Walt, with admirable judgment, had said no. Agar was a hen-pecked man,

and had a habit of celebrating every time he got out of range of his wife's eagle eye. His notion of a swell time, according to reports that never reached Mrs. Agar, was to acquire a thorough jag as quickly as possible. Walt intended to spend his little vacation in other ways.

He had acted upon the taxicab suggestion because it appeared reasonable. Outside the railroad station he had espied a lemon-colored cab and taken it, ordering the driver to go to the Lochinvar Hotel.

A ride of some thirty minutes had followed, and then, quite suddenly, the motor stopped and the cab came to a halt. The driver left his seat, appeared to lift the hood and look at the motor, then came around and opened the side door.

"Boss," he began, and Walt leaned forward to listen. That was the last thing he remembered. Something hard smote him on the head and he went into dreamland.

He came back to consciousness hours later, in the early dawn, and found himself in the doorway of a deserted house. No cab was in sight.

His bags were gone and his clothes were gone—he was dressed in shirt and collar, underclothes, shoes and socks. Near him, on the pavement, lay a suit of clothes, apparently discarded by the cab driver.

Of all his possessions nothing remained save a pile of premium coupons the thief had evidently tossed out of his bag when taking inventory of the loot. Walt had been saving those coupons for years—he found one in every can of smoking tobacco he bought—and he had brought them with him to exchange for a gift.

Swearing and shivering and dizzy from the pain in his head, Walt put on the suit, picked up the coupons, and started out to look for a policeman.

The bite of the wind cleared his head, and before he had gone a block he knew two things for a certainty: first, that the cab had not been a real lemon cab, but a fake; and second, that he could not go to the police with his story.

If he went to the police, the papers would get the facts and publish them, which would mean that Tom Garvin, of the Bridge Point *Gazette*, who got the Chicago papers, would gleefully reprint the item and add some comical comments of his own. And then, Walt knew, all the wise-crackers in town would be waiting impatiently for his return with carefully prepared lines to hand him.

He knew that crew! They'd kid him forever and a day. They worked a joke to death and then used a pulmotor on it and started all over again. Better to lose the money!

Also, there was Myrtle. She'd do a lot of giggling, and probably tell him how sorry she was. Likely, by now, she'd hinted to every one that he'd gone to Chicago to try to forget that she'd turned him down in favor of Pete Barsden.

She didn't know that a month after he'd given her the ring he'd started to realize that he wasn't as deeply in love with her as he'd thought—and she'd probably never know how glad he was when she'd broken the engagement. Oh, well—

Standing there on the windswept corner of Halstead and Madison, Walt dismissed all thoughts of Bridge Point and its inhabitants. He couldn't wire any one for money, because that would be worse than letting the police have the story.

Anyway, it might not be so easy to convince any one by telegram that he, and not some slick crook, was asking for the cash. Despite the fact that he was pretty well off at home, right now he was just a penniless bum in Chicago.

With that cheering thought in his mind, he looked about him—and shivered more than ever.

Sociologists have stated that Madison Street, west of Chicago's "Loop" and the river, is the greatest hobo cen-

ter in the world. The floaters and the drifters, the professional vags and the temporary down-and-outers, make the district their headquarters.

There are flop houses, cheap hotels, innumerable little restaurants with bleary windows, cut-price barber shops, nickel movie shows, second-hand clothes shops, and uncounted employment agencies with windows smeared with letters and figures in white paint and vari-colored placards tacked on boards outside: "First cook wanted—7 days $22; Dishwasher, male, 12 hrs. 7 days, $18."

In the spring and the fall of the year transient workers stop there to be shipped out to the vast wheat fields of the West; during the rest of the year there is less activity, and the ragged, dirty, unshaved ones tramp up and down, or, if the sun is warm, sit on the curbstone and dully, apathetically watch the dreary parade of their kind.

Walt Wilkinson found himself sympathizing with the spiritless, beaten men who passed him as he stood there on the corner, until it occurred to him that for the time being, at least, he was no better off than they and probably looked worse.

As a matter of fact, most of them knew, probably, where they might find a breadline, whereas he possessed no such information. The thought that he did not know where his next meal was coming from jarred him into activity.

For perhaps an hour he tramped about, his eyes and ears on the alert, his brain frantically seeking to evolve some method of escape from his predicament. Once he saw a policeman and was almost moved to speak to him but at the last moment he checked himself.

Dog-gone if he'd give up so easily! Something, somehow, would turn up.

His stomach was starting to protest against the unusual lack of food when a rap of hope appeared. He was on Halstead Street at the time, and his restless eyes caught sight of what seemed to be familiar words on a store window.

He stopped and read the entire three lines of lettering:

TOMAHAWK TOBACCO COMPANY
Premium Dept.
Chicago Mid-West Branch

Almost automatically Walt felt in the side pocket of the coat he had on and brought out one of the certificates the taxi thief had left him. His guess had been right—his profit-sharing slips were those issued by the Tomahawk Tobacco Company.

He saw in one corner the statement: "Value, One Cent," and his eyes brightened. Then, on the reverse side, he read: "This certificate can be exchanged for premiums only, and not for cash."

Disappointed, he remained there for several minutes, idly looking at the articles behind the window. What good would any of that junk do him now? He needed money, and not—

Glancing up, he discovered an elderly man about to enter the shop. Fired with a sudden inspiration, Walt was at his side in a flash.

"Excuse me, mister," he began, speaking quickly, "but would you like to buy a lot of Tomahawk coupons, cheap?"

The elderly man was startled. "Eh?" he said.

Walt brought out two fistsful of printed slips.

"These are regular Tomahawk premium slips—saved 'em up myself," he explained. "I can't use any premium now, though. I need money for a meal, and I'll sell them to you cheap. About a hundred and twenty-five certificates and I'll let you have them for—for seventy-five cents. Want them?"

The man stared at Walt, at Walt's clothes, and then took one of the pieces of paper and examined it.

"H'm," he remarked, "how do I know these aren't counterfeit, and no good?"

"I got them out of cans of Tomahawk tobacco," Walt told him eagerly. "I'll guarantee—look here, you buy them and I'll go into the store with you and if they aren't accepted I'll give you the money back."

"Fifty cents," said the elderly skinflint.

"Oh, say," Walt protested, and then as the elderly one turned away with a shrug he grabbed him by the arm. "All right! Give me the four bits."

The exchange was made, and they went into the shop together. Ten minutes later Walt was on the street again, a round half dollar gripped tightly in one hand and a spring in his step. Not so bad! Half a buck—a meal, anyway!

He headed straight for the nearest restaurant, unmindful now of the cutting wind. With his hand on the door of the place, he turned and saw a slouching figure staring intently through the far-from-clean window at the diners within.

A generous impulse caused Walt to speak.

"Got an appetite, bud?" he called. "Come along—I'll treat!"

The invitation was accepted with alacrity.

Fifty cents bought a considerable amount of food in that restaurant, and Walt and his hunger-bitten companion —whose name turned out to be Joe— enjoyed every mouthful. The knives and forks were of ancient steel, the dishes were incredibly thick and scarred and battered, and the man behind the counter who served them needed a bath badly and wore an apron that never again would be white, but Walt noticed none of these things.

Here was food, and that was the only thing that counted.

"Thanks, friend," said Joe, when they were on the street once more. "That was the first square I had this week. If I ever get the chance I'll do the same fer you. Where you bound now?"

Walt didn't know, and said so.

"Trail along with me, then," Joe invited. "There's a gov'ment auction bein' pulled off on Monroe Street, and we can keep warm there, anyway."

Walt noticed, as they proceeded on their way, that Joe glanced sharply at every man they met. He wondered whether his companion was looking for anybody, or was afraid of meeting some one, but he asked no questions. The very atmosphere of the section is enough to warn the uninitiated that curiosity is better suppressed.

The government auction turned out to be an auction of unclaimed articles conducted by the Post Office Department, and it was being held in what appeared to be an old brick warehouse.

Entering, they found themselves in a large, high-ceilinged room with about two hundred other persons, some of whom were sitting on wooden benches in the center of the floor, facing a raised platform upon which were three men—one standing and talking in auctioneer fashion, the other two seated and writing busily at a table. Others stood along the sides of the room and were either listening to the speaker or looking, through a wire netting, at the exhibit of articles to be auctioned off.

Walt had been a trifle dubious about the reception he and Joe would receive, but no one paid any attention to them. A man stepped up and handed each of them a booklet containing a list of the items to be disposed of, and then turned to supply the same to other newcomers.

"I see a seat," Joe said abruptly, and, without further ado, went down the aisle between the rows of benches and squeezed himself into the space his eagle eyes had discovered.

Walt, seeing no other vacant spot, began to stroll about. It was pleasantly warm in the place, and he was fed, and there really didn't seem to be any sense in worrying about the future.

A fifteen-minute survey of the ar-

ticles on exhibit astounded him. There was everything in the collection from a wooden box containing fifty pounds of used United States postage stamps to a woman's muskrat coat, men's suits and overcoats, women's coats and dresses, silk underclothing, automobile tires, patent medicines, stockings, groceries, printing ink, sporting goods, toys, shoes, fertilizer.

The list appeared endless; a glance through the catalogue showed there were over a thousand lots altogether.

Back in Bridge Point, Walt Wilkinson owned what was conceded to be the smartest men's clothing store in the county, and his buying instinct told him that here, if he only had the money, he might pick up some quality shirts and neckties at bargain prices. But he didn't have the money, and so he resolutely turned his back on the display and gave his attention to the auctioneer.

That gentleman worked rapidly. There was no strenuous effort to force the bids up.

One of the two men at the table read aloud the number of the lot under the gavel, stated what the lot contained, and then the auctioneer requested bids. When the bids ceased coming, the deal was made; there was no haranguing. The lots were disposed of at the rate of one or more per minute.

The bidders, Walt observed, were for the most part of the city shopkeeper type, and half of them were Hebrews. Many of the men there were dressed carelessly, to put it mildly, and, to Walt's amused eye, the ones who were dressed in the worst clothes and appeared far from solvent were the ones who calmly bid fifty and sixty and seventy dollars for various lots.

Tired of standing, Walt moved closer to the benches, and before many minutes passed got a seat when one of the occupants departed. Joe had left his original place and now had a seat where he could lean back against one of the pillars that reached to the ceiling. He looked comfortable, at peace with the world—and half asleep.

Some fifteen minutes later the man next to Walt left, and a girl dropped into the place vacated. Walt paid her little attention until he glimpsed her profile, and then he had to remember that it wasn't polite to stare before he could look away.

She was a pert, smartly dressed, exquisite little thing. Apparently she had just come in from the cold outer air, for her soft cheeks were glowing with color, and her eyes—they were a deep, deep brown, he discovered when he turned again and accidentally met her gaze—were sparkling.

There were well dressed men and well dressed women in the room, but they did not appear out of place, and somehow, in Walt's opinion, she did.

He was wondering about her, trying to guess why she was there and who she might be, and almost ready to yield to the temptation to take another look, when she spoke to him.

"Pardon me," she said, "but I wonder if you would be kind enough to loan me your catalogue for a moment? The man at the door was out of them when I came in."

Walt, hypnotized by his good fortune and the musical cadence of her voice, could only smile and comply with the request.

She seemed to find the booklet extremely interesting, for she studied the pages closely for some time. When she returned it to him, with a smile—dimples, two lovely ones—Walt was ready.

"Odd, isn't it, the variety of things that go through the mail?" he said. "It would be hard to name something not on the list."

She agreed pleasantly. "Odd things—an oddly mixed crowd, and—this is my first auction; and it's all immensely interesting! Just what is the procedure?"

Walt was only too glad to explain.

"The lot number is called and briefly described," he told her, "and then

the bids are taken. The highest bidder, of course, gets the lot. Then the buyer gives his name to the man at the table, posts a deposit with one of the men with the writing pads in the aisle, and receives a receipt.

"The day after the auction ends he calls here, presents his receipt, pays the balance due, and takes away his purchase. Most of the buyers who expect to make a lot of purchases post a large deposit before the sale starts, and in that way save themselves some trouble. Is that clear?"

"Very clear," she returned, "and thank you."

Afraid to let silence fall between them, Walt went on hurriedly: "Do you intend to bid for anything?"

She laughed. "Well, I didn't intend to when I came. But maybe I will. I noticed some silk stockings—"

At that instant the man at the table next to the auctioneer called out:

"Lot No. 76! Three pairs ladies' blue fox silk hose."

"That's just the lot I was thinking of!" exclaimed the girl. "I'd like to buy them. What shall I do?"

The bidding had already started.

"How high do you wish to go?" Walt inquired quickly.

"Oh—two, or two and a half—"

The bid was at one fifty. Walt, catching the auctioneer's eye, raised a hand.

"Gentleman there gives two. Two. Do I hear two and a half? Who'll give two and a half. Two asking two fifty! Who'll—ah, there, two fifty asking for three. Who'll give three—"

"Make it three!" the girl whispered to Walt, and he accordingly did. They got the lot at that price.

"Name?" called the man at the table. "Who bought that?"

Walt turned to the girl, and she said, "Carolyn Bradford."

"C. B." Walt lifted his voice to give the letters, and then told the girl in an aside: "The initials will be sufficient."

"New buyer," said the one at the table. "Get a deposit."

He proceeded to call out the next lot.

One of the men with the receipt pads came down the aisle and stood waiting. The girl opened her purse and brought out three dollar-bills and some silver.

"All I've got with me," she said, with something like a nervous little laugh. "I better pay the entire amount at once."

She handed over the money and received a slip of paper in return. Then she closed her purse and seemed to relax with a sigh.

"And that's that," she remarked.

Walt, a trifle puzzled by her expression, nodded.

Then, for the next hour, Walt spoke to her but once, and that was when she dropped her pencil. She was very interested in everything that went on, and at intervals wrote in a small pocket notebook.

Walt allowed himself to fall into an exceedingly gloomy state of mind. Wasn't it his luck, though, to meet the most wonderful girl in the world just when he was broke and dressed like a tramp? She'd probably leave shortly, and that would be the last he'd ever see of her.

He swore silently but fervently. He could not let that happen. Somehow he had to arrange to see her again when he was out of his difficulties—at the very least, he had to find out where she lived.

He was trying to evolve some method of procedure, when he heard the auctioneer say that it was twelve o'clock and there would be a half-hour intermission for lunch, and that those who wished might avail themselves of the service of the post office employee's restaurant upstairs.

As the people began to mill about, Walt caught the girl's glance.

He plunged.

"I'd like very much to invite you to lunch, Miss Bradford," he said,

"but the fact is that I'm absolutely broke right now."

It was awkward, it was desperate, it was funny. The girl stiffened slightly, and bit her lip—and then smiled.

He did not know it, but the very clumsiness of his speech, coupled with the blush that spread over his face was what saved the day.

"Thank you," she replied. "And inasmuch as I have only thirty cents, which I will need for car fare, I guess we will not eat this noon."

Walt's pulse increased. She was white! She was overlooking the unconventionality of the thing and assuming that he wasn't the kind to misinterpret the fact; and at the same time she was crediting him with enough sense to see that she wasn't a flirt.

"I'll tell you my tale of woe," he went on, "provided you care to hear it. I promise not to beg for any part of your thirty cents."

"I'd like to hear it very much indeed. You aren't by any chance a—a prince in disguise?"

Walt smiled and began at the very beginning. He introduced himself, told of his business in Bridge Point, of his decision to take a bit of a vacation in Chicago, of Ed Agar, and Ed's advice, and everything that followed, ending up with an explanation of his reluctance to let his friends back home know what had befallen him.

She made a fine, appreciative listener.

"Yes," she said thoughtfully when he had finished, "the papers certainly would print your story if they could get hold of it. And your picture, too. Are you sure that your home town friends would become such—such nuisances?"

"Positive," he stated emphatically. "I'd never have a peaceful day again. If I wasn't sure of what they'd do, I wouldn't be sitting here in this imitation of a suit. Which," he added, "I am mighty glad to be doing."

She didn't know what to make of that last statement, plainly, and then their eyes met—held, and in the ensuing five seconds she found the answer, and knew that he knew she had found it. And just for the barest fraction of a fraction of an instant before she turned her head and lifted her chin Walt glimpsed something in the depths of her brown eyes that thrilled him, and he knew that she knew he had seen that something.

He had sense enough to remain quiet, to wait until her chin had dropped imperceptibly, and then to say, a bit plaintively: "I wish I was the hero in a story book."

She did not turn, but her lips were pressed together to repress a smile.

Then the crowd returned, and the auction was resumed. The girl answered Walt pleasantly enough when, occasionally, he spoke to her, but he could see that she was occupied with her thoughts. She no longer sat so erectly, turning her head here and there quickly to catch everything that occurred, as she had in the morning.

It was perhaps two o'clock when she told him that she must go, and prepared to leave her seat. He was about to ask her whether she wouldn't let him have her address, but she shook her head before he could say a word, apparently guessing what he had in mind.

"But—you'll be here to-morrow?" he inquired anxiously as she stood up.

"Perhaps. I do not know." She put out her hand with a frank, boyish smile. "I wish you luck, Mr. Wilkinson—and I hope you find a way out of your fix."

And then she was gone.

II.

For the next two hours Walt sat there, oblivious to everything. Not until the man on the platform announced that the auction was over for the day, and would be continued the following morning, did he recall his surroundings.

"And now what?" he asked himself.

He tried to locate Joe, but failed, and then slowly followed the crowd to the door. He was hungry again—and he'd have to find some place to sleep that night.

"Hey, bud!" said a voice at his elbow, and turning he saw his guest of the restaurant.

"I wondered where you were," said Walt.

"I went out awhile back," Joe explained. "Worked Jackson Boulevard for awhile till I saw a cop eyin' me. Collected forty cents, bud! That'll get us a cup of Java and a couple of sinkers apiece, and a bed later on. Let's go!"

Walt grinned. "Right! Let's go!"

They had their frugal meal, and from then on until ten o'clock that night they tramped around in the cold darkness. At ten Joe led the way to a flophouse, where they paid twenty cents and were entitled to use two of the "beds" therein.

Walt slept little that night. He was afraid of falling off the hard, narrow boards upon which he was stretched; he was disturbed by the various odors that filled the air, and he could not keep from his ears the variety of snores that came from his hundred neighbors.

When he did lapse temporarily into slumber it was to dream of a young lady with eyes of deep, deep brown and twin dimples and a bewitching smile.

At six o'clock Joe and he went out to the street again. At eight o'clock Joe left him, saying he'd probably see him at the auction later on, and at nine thirty Walt was at the old warehouse.

The girl was not there, nor had she put in an appearance when the morning session ended. Walt called himself a fool for expecting her to come, and continued to watch the door hopefully.

She arrived when the afternoon was half over. Walt had relaxed his vigilance to listen to some particularly spirited bidding, and when he faced about again he saw her.

She stood near the door, and seemed to be seeking some one with her eyes. As he started forward she sighted him, nodded slightly, smiled, and looked away. Walt refused to be stopped in that fashion.

"How do you do, Miss Bradford?" he said, on coming up.

She returned the greeting. Then, hesitantly: "Do you know whom I shall have to see about the stockings I purchased yesterday. I—"

"But you won't be able to get them until to-morrow. The auction ends to-day."

"I do not want to get them," she told him, and a warm flush crept over her cheeks. "Mr. Wilkinson, I'm in trouble similar to your own. I have no money, and I would like to get back those three dollars if possible."

Walt started in astonishment. And whistled softly.

"Gee," he said, "we're getting some tough breaks, aren't we? Won't you tell me about it?"

She did, when they had retreated to an isolated corner where there would be no interruption.

The story was simple and short. Her home was in Michigan, and, much against the wishes of her parents, she had gone to Chicago to seek work on a newspaper. Young and inexperienced, she had been unable to get a position.

During the month she had been in the city the only money she had received had been for space work—short sketches of various kinds. The money wasn't enough—and the savings she had brought with her had disappeared.

The day before she had heard of the auction, and thought she might make a human interest story out of it. In fact, she had been so certain that the article would be taken that she had thrown caution to the winds and spent her last three dollars for the stockings. After leaving she had written her story and taken it to the editor of the paper that had printed the majority of her sketches.

Her work was turned down, to her dismay; and no other editor wanted it.

Now she had nothing, and owed room rent.

Walt, touched deeply by the way she tried to keep smiling while the tale came from her lips, spoke up as she hesitated near the end.

"You said yesterday that the papers would gladly print an account of how I had been robbed. You just go now and write that up and sell it. Run along. I'll repeat anything you don't remember," he added.

She shook her head vigorously.

"I can't do that—it would be very selfish. You see, I know how you feel about not letting the home people hear of what happened to you. I could get money by wiring to my dad, but that would be a confession of failure. If I can get those three dollars back, somehow I'll manage!"

"H'm," said Walt. "I don't know about getting a refund. This is going to need a lot of thinking. Here, let's move around a bit—my brain works better that way."

He took her arm, and she did not attempt to deter him. To Walt it seemed that he had known her for ages, and everything was all right between them; perhaps she felt the same way.

Certainly a stranger, observing them as they strolled along the side of the room, near the wire netting that protected the exhibits, would have guessed them to be old friends.

Walt had been somewhat troubled about his own predicament, but now he was infinitely more worried about the plight of the girl. As he saw it, it was up to him to help her out.

But how? He doubted very much whether she could get her three dollars back. Still, they could try. And even if she did get the money—

She interrupted his thoughts with an exclamation, and drew him to the netting.

"There's what I bought," she said, pointing. "Lot seventy-six."

The stockings were neatly folded in a box, the edge of which faced them.

"They look like a bargain for three dollars," Walt remarked.

She leaned forward suddenly. "Why—why they are size ten! See the printing? I thought they were eight and one-half. I can't wear ten!"

Walt brought out his catalogue and skimmed through it quickly.

"You made a mistake," he chuckled. "There are several lots of stockings. Lot number ninety-seven is what you should have bid on. Three pairs ladies' blue fox silk hose, size eight and one-half. You don't want these, and you won't be able to wear 'em if you've got to take 'em!"

She laughed with him, and then was about to speak when there came an interruption.

Joe sidled up to Walt, bursting with repressed excitement.

"Say, bud, I got to get a nickel fer a phone call. Ask the lady if she'll help us out, will you? Hustle!"

"What's up?" Walt asked.

Joe pressed closer.

"See that bird sitting in the second row—the guy with the checked cap pulled down over his phiz?" he inquired. "That's 'Mad Max' Moran, bud, and the police have been huntin' him fer two years. He's a murderer and a dirty rat—he done me dirt once, and I been lookin' fer him ever since I got the dope last week that he was pullin' a hideaway here in Chi. He bust out of the county jail—killed a jailer and there's five hundred bucks goes to the guy that turns him in. Get the jit fer me and I'll phone the police and split with you!"

The girl was quick witted. Before Walt could say a word she opened her purse and extracted a coin.

"My last nickel," she said, and turned it over to Joe.

"That's the stuff!" Joe said. "Now listen, bud. I don't show in this at all, get me? I'm goin' to phone the cops and then I'm goin' to beat it over to the

station. You stick by the door here and when the bulls come, tell 'em you was the guy that called up and point out Max to them. And then ride over to the station in the wagon. I'll be around somewhere when you come out —you'll see me. Got it?"

Walt nodded, and Joe lost no time in disappearing.

The girl was excited. "A real murderer!" she said, and her arm pressed against Walt's hand. "I wonder if there'll be shooting!"

The thought alarmed Walt. "You'd better go out of the building," he advised her. "Come along. I'll wait by the door and you stay outside."

"I'm going to stay right at the door with you," she announced firmly. "Outside! And miss everything? Oh, no!"

He saw it was useless to argue, so he said no more. They took their station and prepared to wait.

III.

Five minutes passed. The auction was proceeding in normal fashion. Walt wondered what the people would do when the big moment came; he wondered if the police would come clanging down the street in the patrol wagon; he wondered if there would be any trouble about getting the reward—whether they'd have to wait for it for days, or get it right away.

Five hundred dollars—that would be two hundred and fifty for the girl. Carolyn. Now that was a peach of a name! Caro—

A blue-coated figure stepped through the door, arms hanging tensely. Keen eyes swept about the room. Walt stepped up to the officer.

"I phoned," he said. "The man you want is sitting in the second row of benches. He's wearing a checkered cap. I'll point him out."

"Never mind," the policeman replied. "The cap's enough."

He went out again to speak to some one. Then he reappeared, and, with one hand resting on his holster, went down the aisle with swift strides. Through the door came four other officers, who quickly distributed themselves about the room.

The auctioneer, suddenly aware of something unusual in the air, stopped in the middle of a sentence, arm upraised.

Carolyn Bradford, her eyes wide and unwinking, her face pale, unconsciously leaned against Walt. Then the silence was broken.

"We've got you, Max! Don't try—"

There was a crash, and in an instant the room was a bedlam. There were shouts, the screams of women, the clatter of overturning benches, the hoarse bellow of the men in blue.

The frantic crowd milled around; men and women fell, were stepped on, and dragged down others in frenzied attempts to get up. The auctioneer's platform went to the floor with a splintering explosion of sound.

Through it all the man in the checkered cap twisted and clawed and fought like a trapped rat. He had no gun, but his fists flailed about with telling effect.

The odds against him were too great, however. Two policemen at last managed to land on him at the same time, and he was literally buried under the living weight.

Unceremoniously he was dragged toward the door, jerked erect, and hustled outside.

With the girl gripping to his arm tightly in her excitement, Walt followed immediately after the police. The patrol wagon was on the street, and after two of the officers had got aboard, the prisoner was thrust inside.

Walt spoke to the nearest of the remaining three bluecoats:

"I'd like to go along. I sent in the tip."

"You and the lady? All right—pile in before that mob spills out!"

An instant later they were in the car and squeezed in on one of the narrow benches that ran the length of the interior. Then the door clanged shut, semigloom enveloped them, and the vehicle started off with a jerk.

During the ride, which, fortunately, was short, the prisoner mumbled and swore until one of the officers told him to shut up. There was no other talk. Walt found one of the girl's hands and held on to it.

The unloading at the station was as rapid as the loading had been. A jump from the patrol wagon, a few steps across the cement walk, and they were inside and facing the booking desk.

Another prisoner was being attended to, but he was pushed aside for the time being.

"Mad Max at last, hey?" was the greeting of the man behind the desk. "Fine work, boys!"

The captive broke out vehemently: "I tell you I ain't Max Moran! I'm Pete Carson, and—"

A plainclothes man had stepped up and now he interrupted: "I'll be damned! It's Carson sure enough. What are you doing here in Chi?"

He did not wait for a reply, but grinned at the men about him.

"A boner, boys! The Minneapolis police picked this same bird up last week and wired us they had Max. I made a special trip up there with papers to get him, but, hell, he ain't Max any more than I am!"

"I'll say I ain't. I come here to Chi to get a job—"

"We'll just search you, anyway," said the man who had led the raid. "You put up too big a scrap for an innocent guy!"

The search was made, and a dozen diamond rings were brought to light. Without waste of time Carson was marked down for robbery and led away to a cell.

Walt and Carolyn Bradford had entered the place with hopes flying. Now they mutely stared at each other.

"No reward," Walt said at last, to the world in general.

"You're the fellow who telephoned?" asked the man behind the blotter. When Walt nodded he smiled sympathetically. "No reward for Carson, I'm sorry to say, except our thanks." Then: "All right, Jim—let's get through with that drunk."

Walt and the girl started for the door with reluctant feet. Behind them the routine of the station started once more.

At the exit Walt halted sharply. It seemed to him that a voice back there sounded familiar. He returned and looked at the man being questioned. His heart gave a great leap.

"Ed Agar!" he yelled.

Ed Agar, of Bridge Point, Missouri, it was—an Ed Agar in the most complete state of ossification.

"Doggone," Mr. Agar said tearfully, burying his face in Walt's bosom. "Doggone if it ain't Walt Wilkinshun. Good ol' Walt. Don' let copsh arresh me, Walty. I got a' wife and childurn. No—shrong—ain't got no childurn. Anybody shays I got childurn'sh a liar. Walty, howsh a boy? Good old Walty! I shure—"

"Know him?" inquired the officer behind the desk.

"Yes," said Walt. "From my home town. Guess he's been celebrating or something.

"He was picked up for making a nuisance of himself. Don't want to be hard on him, though, since he's from out of town. Take him away and keep him off the streets until he's sober."

"And take care of his money," spoke up another policeman. "He's carrying a heavy roll. It's a wonder somebody didn't clean him before I found him."

Walt extracted the wad from Agar's pocket, and his heart began to sing as he got his fingers around its lovely thickness. Then he and his two companions were outside.

Joe had been waiting for them, and now he stepped up, a sheepish grin on his face.

"That wasn't Max Moran, was it?" he said. "It's a tough break, all right—"

Walt laughed. "Not so tough, Joe, not so tough! Here's something for you, with my best wishes." He handed the other a twenty-dollar bill. "So long, Joe, and mighty glad I met you!"

Ten minutes later, heading for Agar's hotel in a taxicab, Walt counted the money. It totaled well over four hundred dollars.

Ed Agar awoke the following morning with a headache and a hazy recollection of a swell time. Then he remembered the money he had collected from his wife's brother, and he bounced out of bed and feverishly began going through his clothes. Nothing. Weakly he sank into a chair.

Presently he noticed some bills on the dresser, and went over and picked them up. Under the money he found two pieces of paper. One was a note signed by Walt Wilkinson. He read:

> You need a guardian, you old sinner, and I guess I'm it. Here's enough jack to see you home. I'll take care of the rest of the money that was in your pockets when I rescued you from the police, and square up later. Here's also a ticket good for three pairs of silk stockings that'll make a fine gift for Mrs. Agar. I'm off on my honeymoon, Ed, with the sweetest girl in the world!

"I'll be blamed," said Mr. Agar. Then he remembered the events of the day before. "Good old Walt! It's a mighty lucky thing for me that I met him! Boy, what a time!"

THE END

WHEN, WHERE—AND HOW!

Little things often bulk large in the transmission of news, whether we are near the most active centers of the world's life, or stationed at one of the "ends of the world."

In the big centers of population, the time element is nearly always the most important factor in sending news; and any one who has ever visited a city newspaper at the height of its working day will never forget the devices for hurrying the word of the latest happenings into print and to the newsstands in the fewest possible moments.

In fact, it has been said that on the big metropolitan dailies the printer's ink announcing the news of a murder—anywhere in the world—is often dry before the victim's body is cold.

The British government recently had the time element in news transmission brought sharply to its attention after it announced the lifting of restrictions on the sale of crude rubber.

This important business news was flashed to the world at 6 P.M., London time, which is 1 P.M. in New York. The announcement was thus made after the London Stock Exchange was closed, but while the New York Stock Exchange was still open.

The result was that every one who was interested in the world rubber market hastened to make appropriate transactions in New York, provided he could get word to his brokers in time, while all the "rubber people" who were dependent on the London market were at the disadvantage of having to wait a day to adjust their business policy to the new governmental regulations.

In the least active places of the world, though, it is usually the element of place rather than of time which counts most. Some missionaries stationed on Southampton island in the upper part of Hudson Bay are still waiting for their 1926 mail because it was delivered by mistake, last summer, at another station on the bay only two hundred miles away.

When the missionary bishop to whom this mail was erroneously brought discovered the slip, he had to send a carrier, with a dog team, to Montreal, where it took the mail man thirteen weeks to arrive in order to have the Arctic radio station there let his near-by colleagues know what had happened to their letters, which were nearly two years old by the time they heard of them.

Rope Neckties

By JOHN WILSTACH

Author of "Under Cover Charges," "The Devil's Flower," "Forged Faces," etc.

He was haunted by a memory that called for revenge, though he seemed just a carefree roamer of the Western cattle ranges

CHAPTER XIV.

I MEET THAT LEADER.

"I'D clean out those two barrels of your Colt, Harry, and reload."

I follered Shorty's reasonable advice after we mounted and proceeded on our way in the same general direction we'd been taking. We got away from that lone form, with the hoss standing near immediate, for it isn't healthy for strangers to be found near a dead body on a hostile range. My story of an even break might not be believed, and my plans was different.

"I'm not a cold-blooded killer," I explains. "It jest happens that one thing leads to another. You know I starts with those passwords of the gang, overheard by my dying brother. Then there is that hoss, ridden either by Mary or the young feller, with our brand still on it.

"Guess after our stock had been driven so far north, they felt safe and was careless. Following this, there came this wonderful accident of getting Leary by himself, and making him think I was one of 'em."

"But Miss Renwood and the cook—won't they say he left with us?" asks Shorty.

"No," I explains. "I gets Mary aside and makes her agree to have Carrie and herself stand pat on the say-so that they haven't seen Leary today."

"Figuring ahead, eh? I see, he could 'a' been killed on the way back to the ranch, and never reached there?"

"That's my idea. And we stumbles on the body, riding to town, our mission being to tell Renwood that his

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daughter is safe home. There must have been a drive of cattle to the railroad, that has reached near to Gorge City, and all the boys are staying over to celebrate."

"Pretty well schemed," admitted Shorty. "And now what do you chalk down as our first move?"

"Act innocent and aboveboard, so there will be no underhand suspicions we have anything to do with Leary's taking off. We'll report directly to the sheriff, and tell that peace officer how we finds the body, and proceeds on to town.

"We don't even know how it is. The killing might easily have been one of revenge, I guess; this yere foreman don't strike me as a very lovable character."

"No, you couldn't say that," retorts Shorty with a grin. "Has you schemed any further ahead?"

"Not 'xactly," I confessed. "I have learned two things: that Renwood is one of the cattle owners mixed up in the conspiracy to get other people's stock, that killed my folks as a side line, and that Boss Deveture is the brains and head of the ring. And that he's feared.

"I want to get both of them, see them stretch rope—a slug of lead is too good for such felons—but we'll have to wait on how things shape up."

Shorty mused a bit as we rode side by side, slouched in our saddles.

"May I make a suggestion and have you take it kindly?"

"Sure thing, pal," I replies. "I'm as open to conviction as any caught coon."

"Well, then, Harry, don't get sweet on Mary Renwood; I see it kind of coming on, and it might complicate matters."

"Not in a case like this," I states, firm and proud. "My vengeance comes before life, love, or happiness."

"Then we won't play our cards ontil the dealer gives 'em to us. I allus thought that sensible, instead of trying to read the back of them. Still"—he wags his head doleful—"this trusting women don't appeal special to me."

I laughs back at him.

"You heard some'eres that females can't keep secrets, eh? That's a libel, in my humble opinion. They even encourage it, being deceptive like," I argues.

"That bridge is burned behind us, anyhow, Harry; we has to find new ones to cross."

Everything well thrashed out, on leaving coming affairs to do their own shaping, we rides along in the same gen'ral direction for a couple of hours. Then it starts to get real dark, sudden, and at the same time we see gleaming faintly in the distance, mebbe a few miles, lights that can mean nothing but Gorge City.

"I'm darned glad we are not trailing this rough cow town blind," I elucidates. "Since we know the lay of the land and the names, anyway, of the two parties with whom we has to deal, it is possible the going won't be so hard."

"Well, Harry, I hears you tell 'bout your earnest desire to deliver said bad hombres to the gallows, for a nice collar dance on thin air; you have given you'self a large order to fill."

But luck was playing my way so far, and I'd force my hand.

The lights came nearer and nearer, and we has our ponies pick up their pace.

"After all, we are bearing news that might be of importance to this yere sheriff; so we don't want to make our entrance with our hosses asleep on their feet."

In ten minutes at most we follows into a well traveled wagon road that winds right into the main street of Gorge City.

"Let's tie our hosses at the first hitch-post we comes across," I suggests, and hardly is the words out of my mouth than I sees one before a big

saloon called the New York Bar. We dismounts and leaves our equines.

"It might be well," said Shorty, "to find the sheriff's name and where he hangs out. A barkeep is my ideer of an info'mation bureau."

We pushes through the swinging doors and into a saloon with enough sawdust on the floor for a circus. A few idlers is making a half-hearted attempt to play pool on an old rickety table, with the green cloth partly ripped off, and the barkeep is breathing into the glasses, polishing them and then holding the result up to the light.

"And after they're all cleaned up, then a lot of drunkards like us make 'em all dirty again," grinned Shorty.

"We hates to interrupt an artist at his work, but we'd like to get a heap of dust out of our throats."

The barkeep was right there with: "What will you have, gents?"

I bet he could be overheard saying it in his sleep. He don't wait for any answer, but pushes a quart toward us, and two big glasses.

"We didn't ask for no bath," said Shorty.

"Put four fingers at the right of the glass and pour till you're even with the top digit," he announces. "That's what we give a customer for his money."

"Ah," says Shorty, "now I see why you got the sawdust so thick—so you won't get hurt when you falls."

We both pour an elephant-size drink, hold our breath, and let her flow down the gullet. Strange to relate, it is mellow stuff, and I tell the barkeep so.

"That's mountain dew from the green grass country of Kentucky. Two drinks, and a jack rabbit is ready to fight a wild cat. Three drinks, and he turns his back on him with scorn complete. Four drinks, and he calls for more than one wild cat. Five, an—"

"We believe you, barkeep," I says. "Set 'em up agin. That stuff nestles and sneaks around inside, and asks for his brother to join him."

Shorty pours himself a smaller one this time, and I'm a bit cautious and do likewise. But you can't go into a man's bar and start asking questions unless you appear a present buyer and possibly a future customer. Otherwise you'd be treated rude and scornful.

"Barkeep," I said, confidential like, "we has an engagement with the sheriff, but we'll be back. I'd rather rest on the neck of this bottle than any place I know. What's the name of the peace officer of Gorge City, and where does he hang out?"

The man behind the bar looks regretful.

"I wish I could say, boys, that he comes in here, but this ain't his reg'lar place to imbibe his forty drops. He is later on in the night to be found at the Oriental Saloon—"

"That's Boss Deveture's emporium?" I queries.

"Yeah. But at this time of the evening Sheriff Martin will likely be in his official shack next to the post office. Right side of same. You won't miss it; it's painted white for purity."

He laughs, as if at something funny.

"Will you gents dampen yer tonsils on the house, 'fore you leaves?"

He pushes the bottle toward us and it would not be polite to refuse. We both takes a small one, just about covering the bottom of the glass.

We hoists, wipes our mouths on the backs of our hands, and says we will be back.

"Our hosses is hitched outside," I tell the barkeep.

"Safe as in a bank," he retorts. "This climate agrees with everything but hoss thieves. They can't breathe here, not very long."

He chuckles and we leaves him, good-natured. Outside on the wooden sidewalk we observes that Gorge City hasn't yet opened much for the night. Hosses are hitched here and there, and I see a few empty wagons with teams, but only a few cattlemen is in sight and

they is sitting around on stoops listless-like.

We continues on our way mebbe a block and a half when I sights the post office, a nice brick building; next door to same is the white shack the barkeep tells us about, and there is a light within.

Crossing the street we hits some fine mud, sticky as glue, but finally pulls ourselves out to the opposite sidewalk. We tries to scrape some of it off, but it's no use. We marches up the two steps and knocks on the sheriff's door.

"Come in," booms a big voice.

The latch is off and we enters a huge room blue with tobacco smoke. Through it I sees at the end of the large room three men playing cards around a table.

"I was looking for Sheriff Martin," I said, hesitating at the door.

"That's me," boomed the same voice, and I notices a mountain of a man, with drooping whiskers, and a star pinned on his shirt, who is dealing the cards.

"This visit isn't exactly social," I explained. "By that I means it has something to do with your office."

"Go right ahead, feller; these two gents are my deputies."

But he lays down the pack of cards and all three men push back their chairs a bit. Now that we has attracted a little attention, so to speak, Shorty and me come forward.

"Fact is, sheriff," I says, "we are two drifting cow-punchers, Shorty Smith and Harry Flint. Some miles back on the prairie we rescues Miss Mary Renwood, and a chap who dies on our hands, from a war party of Injuns. We delivers both to the Renwood ranch, where we has dinner with the young lady. She is there alone with the cook, now.

"On the way back my pony stumbles over a dead body on the plains, bushwhacked it looks like, and I thought you might be interested, so to speak."

All three men jumped to their feet, but more in excitement I savvies than with hostile intent, because they has their hands well above their guns.

"Did you examine this here corpse?" drawls the sheriff.

"Only 'nough to see that he was plugged through the heart and head, and the body being cold, I figure he'd gone out like a light some hours since."

"Could you describe him a-tall?"

I pauses a bit, reflective, as if trying to remember.

"Two things strikes me," I said, slow; "he wore bat-shaped chaps, and the six-gun dangling from one hand had what looks to be a home-made wooden butt."

"Leary," whispers one of the deputies. "He clung to that old we'pon though he could afford a dozen new ones. And the bat chaps; they was of Mexican leather and made for him special."

"Well," announces Martin, "some one has to take the buckboard out and bring in the body. You say, boys, you came direct from the Renwood ranch?"

"Yeah," I replies, "we made a bee line."

The two deputies is looking at one another. The sheriff grins.

"Mebbe both of you had better go, eh, Burke?"

The man addressed growled behind six days' growth of beard that made him look like a pole cat.

"One man can search as well as two. Gerry, we'll match to see who goes out and drags in that stiff."

Sheriff Martin produced a dollar and spun it in the air above the table.

"You call," he demands of Burke.

"Heads!" yells that husky.

Then he swears to beat the old Nick. The coin had come tails.

"We'll search the body when you brings it in," cautions Martin. "There's been too many bodies found with the pockets turned inside out."

Burke turns on him a couple of blood-shot eyes.

"I'll bring Leary the way I finds him," he grumbles. "No one can accuse me of being no grave robber."

"Nothing personal," snapped the sheriff. "You're allus ready to be insulted. Some day a quiet geezer will call your bluff and you'll be so full of holes they'll use you for a sieve."

The deputy stalked out of the place, and his partner, called Gerry, a nice-appearing young feller, laughed.

"Better him than me, peering around with a lantern," he opines.

"If it is Leary," said Martin, "old Renwood will want immediate action. I wonder who stopped his whistle?"

"If you asks us," chipped in Shorty, "all we says is that we don't know the party, but figured it was right to report the finding to you. We could 'a' kept our mouths shut and no one would have been the wiser."

"That's so," retorts Martin, rubbing his chin, "you two boys did the right thing and I thanks you. About this rescue of Miss Renwood and the Injun ruckus, her father's been half crazy since she's lost. Let's meander over to the Oriental and find the old man; he's been liquoring up some, but he will want full details—and like to thank you plenty."

The tone in which the peace officer asked us to go with him was one that implies more an order than an invitation.

We cavorts out of Martin's shack, along with his deputy, Gerry, and let them lead the way to the Oriental Saloon. This said institut'on of mirth and revelry is a short jaunt farther up the main street.

It stands out as pop'larly supported 'cause of twenty or more cayuses tied to the hitch post, while their owners is busting loose inside. There is a big painted sign over the wide, swinging doors, and the sound of fiddling floats out to us.

"The key is thrown away of this yere pride of Gorge City," said Martin proudly. "It glories in the longest bar in the State; a fellow can start sober at one end and by the time he reaches the other he'll be playing tag with pink rabbits."

We drifts in after the peace officers, not reluctant but cautious. Shore, it is some layout I'm here to state. A bar sixty feet long supports five barkeeps at one time, and the rest of the insides is big and roomy.

Over at the right is tables for those who likes to anchor, and extreme ag'in' the walls faro and three-card monte is open but dull this early in the evening. At the back is a circular dance hall, and three music hounds is playing up on a raised platform.

But the dancehall girls is standing around listless, chatting, or persuading cow-punchers who is so groggy they can't see 'em well to saunter to the bar and buy drinks.

The girls get a little round slip for each drink bought, and these they cash in afterward. All the sinews of money-taking is in sight, but customers is slow arriving. By midnight we'd see an entirely different picture, I figgers.

"Toss one down with me," offers Martin, nodding to the barkeep. "I don't want to seem inhospit'ble."

The man with the apron decorates the polished bar and we hooks a quick drink.

I notices that the sheriff nods agin instead of paying for the round; I guess he runs an account, which is usual in cow-towns between pay days.

"I think Renwood will be back in the private cardroom," opines Martin. and leads directly to a door at the right.

This entrance has a sign:

PRIVATE—THIS MEANS YOU!

Martin gives no attention to this warning and swings the door wide open.

Inside, under a big swinging lamp that casts a round golden circle on a card table, I sees four men playing draw poker, but listless, as if jest passing time. A bottle and whisky glasses

is on the table, and the former is down to the dregs.

Three of the men is plain, hard-faced hombres, none in the first flush of youth; desperate-looking; and escaping a powder-burning finish so many years, they must be tough. The fourth man, older than the others, I recognize in a flash.

A thrill goes through me as my mem'ry darts back to peering out from the barn the day my father and brother is murdered. There sits the leader of the ruthless gang, then wearing a Mex sombrero, who directs proceedings!

That face is branded in my mind, cl'ar as a running iron could sear it, with my purpose of vengeance. There he sits, the damn leader of those murderers, and I long to drill him, though that wouldn't satisfy my longing for justice.

"I hates to interrupt a social game," breaks in Martin, smooth like, "but I brings lots of news, both good and bad, so comes on a gallop from my shack."

The four men lays down their cards and gives the sheriff complete attention.

"These two boys claims to have rescued your daughter, Renwood, from a war party of Injuns, and they brings news of finding a corpse, weighed down with lead, that describes like Leary, your foreman, on the way to town from your ranch."

CHAPTER XV.

THE NEW DEPUTY.

IF Martin had set off a stick of dynamite under that table, or the crust of hell cracked, he couldn't have caused more excitement. The table teeters as Renwood pushes back his chair, his men entangle their legs, and one of 'em grabs half a drink from a glass as it starts sliding to the floor.

Renwood flushes and his black eyes dance. He is a beefy, heavy-set party, about fifty, I should jedge; dressed in store clothes that seem a size small, and he's ready to bust out of them. As he jumps to his feet I notice he has his cartridge belt slung under his vest, and a pearl butt protrudes from the holster.

"Let me get the right of this," he blurts out. "First thing, my daughter is safe at home?"

I pushes by Martin, and Shorty elbows Gerry aside. As we are the fellows who done the trick we takes the reward or blame on our own shoulders.

"We brung Miss Renwood back to yer ranch, and a young chap that rides with her," I explains. "He's dead from wounds inflicted by the redskins."

"That last is good news. If they hadn't plugged him I'd have done so, shorely."

"Yer daughter is fit as a fiddle, if a bit upset. We had dinner at the ranch, follerin' her kind invite, then trails in to spread the word."

"Did you see Leary out at the ranch?" Renwood asks, peering at us from under fierce black brows.

"We don't know the gent. No, we didn't see any one, 'side from your daughter and Carrie, the old cook," I returns easily.

Renwood turns to the sheriff.

"What's this report of a dead man with the earmarks of Leary?" he demands.

Martin shrugged his shoulders.

"These fellers breeze into my shack, thinking I should be told first, official like. Like hon'st citizens they reports direct to me, which is right and proper. Loping toward Gorge City they stumbles over a corpse strewn on the plains. They don't bring it into town—"

"I plants my own dead," growls Shorty roughly, "but I ain't fool enough to lug in a undertaking exhibit, which is a late prominent citizen, into a strange town and get a volley of slugs for my pains. No, sir, not this cowboy.

"The corpse ain't of any interest

to us; he don't owe my pal or me nothin'. We jest decides to be reg'lar and report the find. We could 'a' kept our mouths shut. As it is, I'm done answering any silly questions."

He hitched his belt forward.

As I tells you before, meek as a lamb with a pal, Shorty can be a horned toad on a holiday with strangers.

"I sent Burke out with the buckboard to bring in the body," interrupts Martin, as Renwood's men don't like Shorty's attitude none, and it looks like trouble.

"How does you connect the dead man with Leary?" continues Renwood with narrowed eyes.

"Mr. Flint," replies Martin, plumb polite, "notices the stiff wears bat chaps, and has a wooden butt to his gun, which he is still clutching. Leary affects chaps on this line—and is the only one that does—and also has a home-made handle to his six-gun."

Renwood grunted. "Well, we'll have to wait until Burke returns."

I could see the cattleman was worried, but he tried to throw it off.

He turned to us with a fake smile and an expression that he attempted to make agreeable. Having a mouth that is a thin slit in a dark, glowering face, the edges of the lips did not turn up, and his sardonic grin wouldn't have fooled a lost puppy eager for a home.

"Gents, I wants to apologize for my overeager display of interest in a done departed foreman, but Leary was my right-hand man. It ain't," he went on, "that I don't rejoice at the rescue of my daughter, Mary, and I want to thank you gents proper for saving her life."

He offers his hand and I was forced to shake it, or explain why not. You can imagine it shorely goes ag'in the grain. But I had a further aim than merely blotting Renwood out—either him or the chief I'd yet to meet—Boss Deveture; my revenge calls for a high and complete finish.

Eight men was cramped in that card room, and the game of draw poker was at an end complete. The pack of cards was strewn over the table, some of them had fallen to the floor. One upturned—the ace of spades, the death card—I spurned with my feet.

"I want you gents to have a drink with me," said Renwood. "Let's mosey out to the bar. It's stuffy in here."

We stomps out in single file over to the bottle emporium, and we must have loomed up as a hard-appearing crew; anyway we has a space to ourselves.

While we libates Renwood questions me polite about the Injun fight, and was surprised that we went to the trouble of bringing the dead feller back to the ranch.

"I couldn't leave him there to be scalped, Mr. Renwood," I counters, "as well as mutilated the way them savages hanker after."

"Humph; well, he's cashed in his chips and I'll plant him reg'lar. But he had a fitting end to his c'reer."

Renwood, unlike Leary, doesn't ask how far away we find Mary and her swain crowded by the redskins, so I refrains from making excuses as to our being bad judges of distance.

I can see that the cattleman is worried, under the surface, by what seems to be right news of the death of his foreman, and is wondering deeply who perforated him, when, and how. And was it *coming from* the ranch that Leary bites gravel?

Not that he actually doubts our story—not yet. But, taken by and large, crooked gents jest seep suspicion from their pores; they are chuck full of it, and Renwood was no exception. Besides, if his right-hand man was picked for a secret homicide, might not he be the next on the list?

Follering nacheral reasoning, I could almost read his mind. It waren't any friendship or devotion to Leary that was bothering Renwood, or starting tear ducts. He was thinking of his own precious hide.

As I stands there, foot on the rail, holding my empty glass, I wonders at the strange pranks of nature, that the old hellion facing me could have a daughter like Mary. 'Nother example of a lily springing out of mud. Neverth'less, such a fact would have no power to swerve my purpose.

"Let a stranger buy a drink," opens Shorty, rattling a gold piece on the bar. "I allows to treat you, gents. Barkeep, pass the p'isin."

The bottle, Old Jordan, is set up ag'in, and I slides it toward Renwood. He nods thanks of my being so courteous and pours a lib'ral dash. He has gargled plenty already, but is steady on his pins as a rock. Only a pallor under the tan shows he was quietly been getting a skinful. His punchers, too, seem to have lapped up the stuff with no appar'nt effect.

The Oriental is starting to fill up, by now, with a rough-spoken but good-natured bunch of cattlemen, and some fellers with courthouse clothes I takes to be buyers. There's a gen'ral hum of conversation, but I notices our gang is left a cl'ar space at the bar. Renwood must be a power, and in the West when that is so a man is given room for his elbows.

Now that we has told our story, conversation is so light you could blow it easy as a feather. Martin and Gerry is sparing of talk, and Renwood and his hired hands act restless.

"Burke should be back with his buckboard and the body by now," snaps Martin. "He's had time enough to make it."

"That team is fast as jack rabbits," adds his aid. "I can't see what's keeping him."

"Mebbe," drawls Shorty, "he's makin' a special, official 'xamination of the remains."

"What do you mean by that?" grates the sheriff.

"Aw, nothin'," replies Shorty, and whistles, gazing up at the swinging lamp over his head.

There is a pause. Shorty has as much as intimated Burke is searching the body. How that little runt craves a ruckus is a caution. And this time I'm afeard he is crowding to get it.

Just then the swinging door, which I has been watching out of the tail of my eye, flies open, and the absent lurches in. Toward us stalks Burke, and he is mad cl'ar through.

"Leary is on the buckboard in front of your office," he says to Martin.

Then Burke turns to us, and his manner is hostile.

"You gents didn't say nothing 'bout Leary's hoss," he exclaims, sudden. "I finds his sorrel pony standing over the body."

"No," says Shorty, low and slow. "We didn't speak about a hoss—'cause we didn't see none. Since we isn't hoss thieves, we don't pack eyes so eager for other folks' equines."

"You don't 'sinuate?"

"Take it as it lays, partner. I ain't backing water for any two-bit deputy."

Burke kind of slouches away a few paces, sliding on his heels, and a clear space is left between, around, and behind both him and Shorty.

"I says that hoss was standing guarding the body," repeats Burke.

"All right, boy, but go slow. I jest wants to find out if you alludes to my lyin' when I says I see no hoss. If so, mebbe I'll register my own opinion."

The deputy is breathing hard, and standing legs far apart, with his fingers closing and unclosing a faint few inches above his low-hung six-guns.

"I know hosses," he says in a deep voice, "and how they acts. A hoss that is a pet never leaves his master's dead body. I thinks you is a liar, and a dirty—"

Burke's hands settle on the butts of his guns and he twists 'em up, planning to shoot through the open ends of the holsters. Quick, but a plumb inaccurate way of firing.

Both barrels belched flame, and I heard a shrill cry far behind me. But

I'm watching Shorty. He only pulls one gun, from low on his hip, but it burns powder immediate.

Jest one, shot, but Burke clutches at his right shoulder and topples back from the force of the bullet; his legs collapse beneath him, and he falls backward on the floor. There wasn't six paces between the two of them, and a forty-five slug has some kick.

Shorty is standing with smoking gat, peering around for any friend who wishes to join Burke. There is no one who seems to want to buck his game.

Jest then the silence is broken by another cry. A cow-puncher, whom I guess I first heard 'way at the back, runs forward grabbing his left arm.

"That damn deputy is a rotten shot," he yells. "Burke hit me in the arm, and I was clear out of the line of fire."

Renwood spoke to the barkeep: "Send a messenger for Doc Bradley; a couple of cases for him."

Shorty is gazing steady at the sheriff. It is up to him, after all, and I'm watching Gerry with particular attention.

Martin made up his mind sudden.

"Gents," he announces, "Burke has been asking for it ten days past. Plain contrary and hostile. I watched his game; and he reached for his guns first. A cl'ar case of self-defense. Besides which he ain't my deputy any more; he's a rotten shot. A hombre who misses that close, a target plain as a barn door, oughtn't to be allowed to go armed."

I laughs, as does the rest, gen'ral.

Burke is laid over in a corner. That puncture in the right shoulder may lay him up some, but it ain't dangerous. It is where a gun-fanner shoots when he wants to put a man on the shelf for a spell, not kill.

"Thank you, sheriff," says Shorty, hearty. "I likes your style and I cares for your gait. And if you needs a new deputy I'm your man."

They shake hands like brothers, and now I'm on to Shorty's game. He outthinks me. There was meaning and method behind this ruckus.

"I buys a drink to let us forget this little annoying unpleasantness," I announces.

Renwood grunts, but joins, and he downs his quick. We crooks our elbows, likewise, like a salute.

"Now that the air's cleared," says Martin, "suppose we all goes over and inspects what's left of Leary."

I looks for Shorty. He is jest returning from unpinning Burke's badge from his shirt, and is shining it up on his sleeve before putting it on.

"All right, sheriff," he says, with a grin. "Your new deputy is with you all the way."

CHAPTER XVI.

GETTING IN STRONG.

WE promenades from the Oriental in a body, eight of us, with Burke elim'nated, and walks down to where the team and buckboard waits in front of the sheriff's shack.

As there seems to be no volunteers, Shorty and I lifts the body of the dead foreman and carries same into Martin's office. That peace officer sends a hurry-up call for Sam Barnes, the coroner, and waves back the idle crowd that is beginning to gather.

Inside there is no bench or sofa on which to lay the remains proper, so we planks our heavy load down on the floor.

"Sheriff, you being in charge, search Leary's clothes," suggests Renwood, who stands puffing at a cigarette and looking down at his ex-foreman without a trace of sorrow.

Martin kneels down and goes to work like an expert pickpocket showing off for company. The total results is nothing to get excited about: ten dollars in gold, some loose silver, a bag of tobacco, a claspknife, a cheap silver watch, and a bunch of keys.

As no paper shows up in the search, I bet Renwood is anxious to get back to the ranch for to have a look-see, but he makes no remarks on that score.

In a few minutes Mr. Barnes puts in an appearance; a little feller who could pass for a grave digger anywhere. He makes a superficial examination of where lead had been distributed, and then declares that Leary has come to an untimely end at the hands of parties unknown. This doesn't come under the heading of news from the front.

Sheriff Martin takes possession of the revolver, from which two shells has been fired, showing Leary has tried to defend himself, but had been slow on the draw and bad on the aim. As an object of interested inspection, Renwood's late right-hand man is in the discard.

I believe Renwood alone worries as to who removes his foreman from the scene of Gorge City festivities. He must have been an unpop'lar cuss, 'cause I don't hear no regrets 'bout the pore departed; he's regarded as out of sight, to mem'ry not so dear.

Renwood turns to me, particular.

"If it is agreeable to you, Mr. Flint, I'd like to have you ride out with me to the ranch in the morning. You don't scorn work none?"

"No," I replies, cautious, "but I aims to breathe Gorge City air for a few days, as a change from the open range. But I'll be glad to drift out with you. What time, say?"

"'Bout ten o'clock. I'll meet you in front of the Oriental."

"All right," I told him. "My partner and me is going to locate a room at the hotel 'fore they are all gone. Mebbe see you later."

All has the thought of leaving that shack, and we files out with Renwood in the lead, me following behind him. As the cattle owner steps to the wooden pavement a rough looking varmint darts from the side of the building.

His gun is drawn, but he holds it with the barrel pointing up, a fool way to carry a shooting iron. He is in his cups, lurching a bit, but none the less dangerous.

"Blast you, Renwood!" he cried. "I'll—"

And at that instant I drew and smashed him over the head with the heavy barrel of my Colt. I'd bent my gun over his skull, and it is a wonder that I didn't break it.

This hombre staggered forward, suddenly slid to his knees, and then fell in a heap on the sidewalk. He was knocked out cold as old toast. The revolver fell from his relaxed fingers, and the blood started to drip from a little rivulet starting at his forehead.

Altogether this quick scene was a matter of seconds.

Renwood, too late, if I hadn't interfered, half drew from his holster, but I grabbed him by the arm.

"I downed this cuss before he could slaughter you in cold blood," I announces, "but the feller is drunk as a boiled owl, so I didn't fire. That's why I bends my gun over his head."

The cattleman surveyed the prostrate figure with scorn. The man's eyes were glazed, and the dripping blood seeping down over his dirty beard made him look like something the coyotes refused to have for dinner.

"You saved my life, I guess," Renwood said slowly. "This yere is Hink Dawson, a desperate sort of character; he's a no-good cow-puncher I fired several weeks back, for private reasons. He swore he'd get me, but I put it down to a drinking man's ravings, and paid no attention."

"Why not put him where he can't do no more harm to-night?" I suggests. "He'll wake up thinking he's growed a mountain on his head with a volcano in it. You-all have a reg'lar, honest-to-goodness lockup?"

"Shore, that's a good ideer," said the sheriff, "and we have a jail fairly pining for prisoners. Gerry and

Shorty, will you fellers throw him on the buckboard and we'll take him down and pick out a cell."

"I'll see you over at the hotel," I told my bunkie, and he half winked at me.

Renwood, suddenly turned excessive friendly, pressed me to go back to the Oriental. This saving of his worthless life had registered a great hit with him.

"You're one quick, bull's-eye kid," he said admiringly. "It's thinking and acting in a split second that does the trick. In another moment I might have been dead meat; I didn't even see Dawson dart out from the side of the shack. You must come to the Oriental as my guest."

Finally, upon my suggesting that I join him later, I was able to break away from the party.

Sauntering down to the Gorge City House I compliments myself on a piece of luck. That downing of Renwood's revengeful cow-puncher, 'fore he could do any harm, might help me in more ways than one.

At the hotel I found an empty lobby, but after stomping about a bit an old feller appears with a stiff collar around his neck that might have been white, once, and requests my pleasure.

"My pal and me desires a room," I tells him, "one with a big bed, 'cause he kicks in his sleep. We want said sleeping chamber facing the street, so we can leap if there's a fire, and also know whether it's day or night."

He walks to a rack and tosses me a key.

"One flight up, right in the front, number twelve," he says. "Two dollars, please."

He pointed to a fly specked sign:

NO TRUST—NO BUST

I laughed, paid in advance, and sat down in a chair to wait for Shorty.

In 'bout twenty minutes he joined me.

"This is the maverick," I says, pointing to my pard, "so don't mistake him for no burglar jest 'cause he looks bad."

Shorty rubbed his deputy badge.

"I'm shore tough," he growls, "for I'm the feller that robs the burglars!"

"I'll go put them two silver dollars in the safe right away," grins back the old bird, who you can't string none.

We moves upstairs to room twelve, just big enough for a bed, a bureau, and one chair. But it looks out on the street and that is something. The next room has an open door, and is empty, and our sleeping quarters is at the end of the hall.

Shorty drapes his Stetson over the doorknob so it covers the keyhole.

"We takes that drunken party to the lock-up," he tells me. "He's so groggy he don't know what happened to him, or who hit him."

I grunted. "I've been thinking that Hink Dawson over, and I think he is worth a talk and a scare. Wonder if I could get to see him early in the morning?"

Shorty grinned.

"The sheriff and me is like loving twins jest restored to each others arms after years of being apart. I got a key to the lock-up, like a reg'lar deputy in good standing."

"Well, we'll ramble down there a little after sunup. You may have figured it kind of funny, taking everything into consideration, my saving Renwood, but I have a more pleasing end in store for him."

"I'm trailing your way, Harry; you've been aces so far. We both is edging in strong, I'm thinking. Renwood will have to think of you as his sav'or from now on."

"Yeah," I said, "but he is going to do some dazed and dizzy figuring when he finds that paper gone. By the way, mebbe, it is chuck full of infermation."

I points to the hat. Shorty reaches for it and replaces mine over the keyhole. Then he carefully takes the paper

from the sweat band and we gives the document the closest attention you ever see.

We is persuing a list of cattle business between Renwood and Deveture, showing what herds is sold through Deveture, the prices paid at Fort Prescott, and the amounts received and paid over to Renwood by the boss of Gorge City. There is no payment shown yet on the tally of the last three thousand head of cattle delivered to Deveture.

But that ain't what interests me. Third from the top is a mention of fifteen hundred head of Bar T brand, sold at ten dollars a head, a time back, and fifteen thousand dollars paid.

The Bar T brand is that under which the Hawley cattle was registered. That was the stock stolen from my father, brother, and me, the time the two of them is murdered. I hadn't been wrong when I recognized Renwood as the leader of that slaughtering bunch of riders who killed my kinfolk.

"This is evidence," said Shorty slowly, "to send Renwood away to prison for years, even if you can't link him with the murders."

"Keep it, as you value your life," I said. "I want to see both of 'em swing high and handsome. Nothing else will satisfy me."

"That paper 'll be safe all right, partner," Shorty grinned.

"Where are you going to hide it?" I asks.

"Never you mind—where no one will ever think of searching."

He takes off his shoes and creeps over on the bed against the wall. The springs creak and squeak like a rat jest caught in a trap. His eyes closed, but the cigarette was still clinging to the lower lip.

"I'm tired, Harry," he yawns. "Run along and play marbles some more if you desires. You find me here when you returns. I've had 'nough excitement for one day."

"I'll go down to the Oriental for awhile," I opines. "I've scored strong with Renwood and I don't want it to wear off. Besides, I wants to meet Deveture."

"O. K., Harry, run along. When you goes I'll hide that val'able paper. I don't want even you to know where it is; you might bunk into a mind-reader. Me, I ain't got none to read!"

He flopped over on one side. Trusting him plenty, I leaves the runt peaceful there, yet I don't think he will be disturbed. Shorty has shown Gorge City already that he is dynamite to an unfriendly touch.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MURDER WITNESS.

LEAVING the hotel it occurs to me to take our hosses to a combined livery stable, harness and blacksmith shop, run by a nice, friendly Southerner named Mosby. He allows he'll feed our cayuses and lodge 'em in hay-strewn stalls, reg'lar hosses' heaven.

My duty done toward them equines I strolls down the street toward the Oriental, feeling like a free and confirmed citizen of Gorge City.

I drifts into the Oriental, plumb crowded by now, and eases to the bar. Fact was I didn't aim to seem a-looking for Mr. Renwood. After the barkeep responds to my order and displays a glass and a quart of nose paint, I pours a drink and lets my eyes rove casual-like about the place.

Business shore is humming. The dance hall is filled with gals and loco punchers swaying and lurching, and the gambling tables are getting a heavy play. I spots Renwood sitting by a faro game, next to the lookout, talking to a hawk-faced man in a black suit and wearing a dark felt hat pulled down over his eyes.

Renwood catches my eye and beckons me to come over to him.

I approached by a roundabout route, stepping out of folks' ways, and over

num'rous outstretched legs. Space was scarce.

Renwood gets up from his seat and greets me cordial.

"Mr. Deveture, I want to make you known to Harry Flint," he says, "the gent I tells you about who saves my life to-night by using his brain and his gun at the same instant."

The hawk-faced man takes my fingers with a thin hand, but he has a grip of iron.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Flint. A second's quickness often means a feller cheats the cemetery a-plenty."

"Aw, it was nothing," I replies, getting into an empty chair. "If I allus bent guns over varmints' heads instead of plugging 'em with lead I wouldn't have had to skip so many counties. My thumb just gets extreme impatient."

"A gun fanner, eh?"

Deveture's eyes shine with interest in their gray depths under the black brim of his hat.

"Just a wee bit faster," I grins. "The old thumb can feel in the dark—no fumbling for a trigger. Wish I had the money I spent on ammunition, for practice; but throwing down fast has saved my life times too num'rous to mention."

On purpose I was giving the impression of being a hard case. Deveture, who listens intently, don't seem armed at all. Guess he wore a shoulder holster that fitted in under his arm, showing none with his coat on.

"You here on a business trip, 'side from that rescue of Renwood's gal from the Injuns? Saving lives ain't yet developed into a business, far as I know."

Deveture bent forward in his chair to await the answer to the question.

"I agrees saving lives gets no dinero, but snuffing 'em out is a profession," I laughed harshly. "I'm what they calls a soldier of fortune; my gun belongs to him who hires me—but I don't want any cow-punching for a spell."

"That so," drawled Deveture. "Well, mebbe I'll have some work that'll meet your fancy around here for you. Living over at the Gorge City House?"

"Yeah."

"Then don't pay no room rent, if you hasn't already."

"I gave the man two dollars," I said seriously.

"Get it back; say I said so. Your room is free. And any time you need a little money—you know what I mean—twenty or thirty in gold—draw on my faro dealer. He'll tell the man on the day shift."

He called to the gambler.

"Give Mr. Flint what he wants, in reason," he said curtly, "and tell Blackwood to do the same."

The man nodded, and Deveture gave me a searching glance.

"Things is coming to a head here in Gorge City, like a sore boil that has to burst. There's going to be a showdown you might call it. I've been running this town since the first hut was put up on the prairie, and, by thunder, I'm a-going to continue.

"I need a man like you, with sense but no scruples. When I heard how you saved Renwood to-night I was pleased proper. As to your duties—none, till I say the word. But stick around so I can get you when I need you."

"That's cheerful talk to me," I says. "I'll consider myself hired."

"I'm never here until four in the afternoon," continues Deveture. "So, onless something unusual is on, the day is the same as your own."

While we makes this agreement I could see Renwood wasn't what you'd call pleased. Mebbe he wanted me as a killer for pay himself, or a guard. Hair-trigger hellions seemed in demand. Possible Leary's mysterious taking off had stirred 'em up, and they hears a secret voice whisperin': "Next!"

I had no slightest doubt, you may be sure, that this open-handed attitude of Boss Deveture meant I was on the reserve list for some damn dirty work. Nothing onusual, of course. Paid retainers of powerful interests was nothing new in wild cattle towns. Law reached out from county seats, but it wasn't as fast or final as a six-gun.

The conversation grew reserved and I commenced to think Shorty had shown wisdom in fitting his form to a bed.

"If you don't mind, gents, I'll run along. I'm tuckered out, and a bed looks like a novelty. See you in the morning, Mr. Renwood, and good night to you, Boss Deveture. You'll allus find me within call."

Deveture smiled thinly at the way I addresses him. I swaggers to the bar, calls for a nightcap, and pulling my Stetson down over my brow I leaves the Oriental flat. There is no clock there and I never has a watch, but I has a hazy ideer the cuckoo bird has coughed a couple of times since midnight.

Shorty is asleep in our room, the door is unlatched, the key inside.

"Careless, I calls it," I grumbled, but Shorty stirs and swears at me to be quiet.

"Jest taking a cat-nap," he says. "Lock the door and shut up."

I does as I'm told, pulls off my boots, and soon both of us is closed up in sleep.

It must be some time after seven o'clock in the morning that I awakens, sees the sunshine streaming in, and remembers that there is business to be done. I grabs Shorty and tells him it is time to get up. He groans, turns over, but I perseveres.

"Let's go down and see that pris'ner," I suggests, "and then put on some ham and eggs."

"I ain't had forty winks," complained my bunkie, rubbing his eyes. "That liquor don't sit well; it's tipping over to one side this morning."

"I'm going light on it, for one," I remarks. "I'm a hired gun-fanner now and has to have clear eyes and a steady hand."

While we gets on our boots I tells Shorty of my interview with Deveture.

"Get the news on conditions," I tells him, "and I'll sound out Mosby at the livery stable; both of us coming from the south, he seems right friendly. There must be a law-and-order party that Deveture must soon figure on bucking."

He nods, and we makes a break for the pitcher on the bureau with water in it. We pours it into the bowl and takes turns dousing our heads. I sure has decided to go slow on liquor, being as I was to be around Gorge City.

A cowboy riding in for a monthly jamboree was one thing; he goes back to the range and sweats the p'isin out of his system. Sticking near where they was setting 'em up frequent was a dawg of a different color.

As we leaves the room Shorty locks the door and pockets the key. I had already told him I was riding out with Renwood to the ranch.

Outside, the sun was starting to beat down on as empty a street as you ever sees. A few neglected hosses, being given inhuman treatment, stands sad at hitching-posts, but there isn't a soul in sight. The saloons is still open, but the light of lamps is yellow and sick, and they is far from pretty inside, as all who can move on their feet has gone.

We saunters down to the jail, a stone building that is small but two stories high, with tiny barred windows. Shorty unlocks the door and we enters.

"Dawson is up on the top tier," says Shorty, "and as you will see him alone, mebbe, it would be safer—"

But I was already draping my silk handkerchief to hide the lower part of my face.

"The sheriff said to let him go in

the morning, with a warning," he continues. "Renwood won't prefer no charges; Dawson didn't do anything, anyway—he was stopped before he started."

Shorty flops in a big chair, and I climbed the stone stairway and peered into five empty cells. Dawson was in the sixth, sprawled on a wooden bench, one leg dangling over to the floor.

"Dawson," I says, guarded.

He groans and holds his head. Then he blinks and sits up on the bench, peering out half-awake and half-asleep.

"You're in danger of being planted this morning," I tells him, earnestly. "The ideer is for the sheriff to release you at ten o'clock; Renwood and his cow-punchers will be waiting with the fixed plot of shooting you on sight. You won't even be armed."

The man continued to touch his head.

"Somebody bent a gun over your scalp last night jest as you had some notion of nicking Renwood."

"I was drunk," he growled, shamefaced, "or I'd never made such a fool play."

"Does you want to stay in the land of the living?"

"Has I a chance?"

"Got a hoss?"

"Yeah, stabled at Mosby's. But no gun; they took it away from me."

"I'll give you a weapon, and let you out now, with a couple of hours start, if you play on my side of the fence. You want revenge on Renwood?"

His blood-shot eyes was pleading.

"That's the only thing that 'll make me happy."

Then I spoke slowly. "You know this code: *The Gorge City cattle pen need filling.*"

Dawson stood up, pressed forward till he had hold of the bars, and peered through at me.

"You has the pass-words," he whispered.

Then I tried my luck on a new tack. I had to seem to know more than I actually did.

"You was down south with Renwood when they ran cattle up?"

I stated it as a fact.

"What if I was?"

"You remember the Hawley ranch and those two men who were blotted out?"

Dawson opened his mouth in surprise, showing long, fanglike, yellow teeth.

"How do you know all this, feller?"

"Never mind, but there is a lot of hell a-brewing, and some folks is going to stew in their own fat. How'd you like to save yourself and at the same time send Renwood to the noose, and watch him swing?"

"How can I do that?" he whispers.

"By turning State's evidence when the time comes. I'm saving your life now—but I gives orders as a reward."

"To get Renwood I'll do anything you say," Dawson answers hoarsely.

"Then get to your hoss and ride like fury to Fort Prescott, the county seat, and lay low when you get there. Savvy? Got any money?"

"Not much."

I flipped him a twenty-dollar gold piece.

"But how 'll I know you?" he asks.

"My name is Hawley," I told him, "and I want Renwood as bad as you do."

"I'll play fair with you, partner," he said huskily. "You get me out of this jail and I'll be in Fort Prescott when you wants me Ask for me at Pedro's, a Mexican joint out on the edge of town."

The man was trembling with excitement. I really believe he felt that I was saving his life. Mebbe he wouldn't have been safe any longer in Gorge City; I dunno.

Shorty unlocks the cell and gives Dawson back his gun. He affirms to me that he can be trusted, and I believes him, for the hatred that shone in his eyes when he mentioned Renwood's name was like a devil fire.

"The next we sees of him is when

he is streaking for the stable, walking in the middle of the street, hobbling along on his high heels.

"I think thar's one witness we needn't to worry 'bout. They can sing songs about the power of love, but revenge is sweet, and one of the strongest emotions that ever was known to man. Further, as regards Dawson, that hombre thinks we saved his life."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HIDDEN DOCUMENT.

AS we strolls out from the jail, a few minutes later, what does we observe in the distance but a cloud of scudding dust. Dawson is lying low over his pony and scenery is disappearing plenty under the equine's legs. He is losing no time in leaving Gorge City and heading for Fort Prescott, according to our agreement.

Presently we enters a Chinese restaurant and puts away an order of ham and eggs as a mere trifle for gents with an appetite. Then Shorty and I separates, as I don't want the pris'ner who has been released to be connected up with me.

I loafs around the combined harness and blâcksmith shop of Mosby for awhile, swapping lies and getting an earful on conditions.

It appears that Deveture is still running the town in his own way, but he has two opponents who want to bring law and order to Gorge City.

They is Mark Tucker, editor and proprietor of the *Gorge City Weekly*, and Hanly Brown, owner of a gen'ral store. They opines the city has sowed 'nough wild oats and should become peaceful-like, and this is, of course, impossible under a ruthless one-man rule.

Dire threats, says Mosby, has failed to move these two men, and Tucker, particular, has a lot to say in his paper 'bout the evil power that has Gorge City in a grip of iron.

"Deveture will end by having these two men killed off," draws Mosby, "and it ain't right. If Tombstone, Arizona, finally had to become a spot where a party is free from a dose of lead from unknown quarters, there's no reason Gorge City can't come to it."

We got into a talk on ways and methods of killing folks off, romancing on the subject from six-gun to p'isin' and the noose. Then, in talking about lynching, we had a little argument, and makes a bet on same.

Mosby has a theory that he is willing to back and prove that appeals mighty strong to me, if it will work, and he says it will. And he is ready to tackle it right away, having all the equipment to go ahead. He only asks for a couple of days.

Through doing this Mosby brings about the oddest finish to a murder trial ever heard about in Carson County. I will give credit where it is due when the time comes in my story.

A few minutes before ten o'clock I leaves Mosby, our wager making him feel quite agreeable, as he ventures he was right in the stand he takes.

"Wait a day or two till you hear from me," he says. "I'll try the jigger out on myself first of all—so there won't be no fatal accidents."

I tells him the ideer is his own, and up to him to prove it. If a winning hand, I has a notion to work it out in a way that will break the bank certain.

Then I takes my hoss, Blackie, from his stall and rides down to the Oriental. Renwood is waiting for me, with his three cow-punchers, all mounted and looking the worse for wear. Their eyes is red-rimmed and they has that rundown appearance of fatigue that goes with no sleep and a few shots of belly-wash in the morning.

Renwood greets me sociable enough, the others grunt a greeting. Without another word we turn our hosses down the main street at a gallop and set out at a nice pace for the ranch.

It is a cool, pleasant day, and the prairie is brimming with color from

grass and flowers, but these sports never observes this beauty none. They sit hunched over their hosses, smoking nervously, and acting as if their tongues had been cut off.

I wonder some, why Renwood asks me out to his ranch. Of course, I really wanted to be there, in case any incriminating questions is asked of Mary Renwood, but he doesn't know that. Nothing was said worth repeating on that ride out to Renwood's ranch; I don't get chatty with folks what desires silence so thick it can be cut with a knife, no, sir, not me.

It is some time before noon that the main building heaves into sight. When we reaches it the cow-punchers ride around to the back, and I see no more of 'em for the present; Renwood and I together dismount at the front hitch post.

Mary comes out as if she had been waiting for us. She smiles at me and greets her father with a pecking at his cheek. It ain't what I'd call an affectionate reunion.

"Call Carrie," says Renwood in a harsh voice, and in a minute the old lady comes out, too.

Up to now Renwood has been holding himself somewhat under a leash, but he throws it off as if with a feeling of great relief.

"Does you know what happened yesterday?" he almost shouts.

"No," replies the girl, "nothing except that Mr. Flint brought me home, after that terrible experience with the Injuns."

"Yeah; I suppose neither you nor Carrie saw Leary during the day? You know he left for the ranch to bring me an important paper."

"No, I didn't see him at all; did you, Carrie?"

The old cook shook her head.

"Last I saw of yer foreman he was p'inting to town with you and the boys."

Renwood stared hard at both of them, and breathed a big sigh that threw a load offen his mind. But he was a suspicious critter; being a double crosser himself he didn't trust others none.

"Leary must have been downed on the trail out thisaway," he murmured, almost to himself.

Suddenly another thought struck him, coming from the fact of his being so untrusting.

"You-alls stay here a minute," he says, cold and polite. "I'm going inside, but I'll be right back."

He walked rapidly toward his private office.

Mary's face was mantled with a faint flush, and the old woman also was sure shocked by the news of Leary's death, coming so sudden, without a word of warning.

"Keep cool and trust me," I said in a low tone of voice. "I can explain everything, but I need time."

I wished to change the subject. "Miss Mary—your father didn't seem so pleased to see you."

"Lies, lies, I'm sick of lies," she whispered back. "He isn't my father, jest my stepfather, and I hate him. My mother married him two years ago—poor mother, it is as well that she died when she did. Her life knew no peace nor the slightest contentment."

My heart leaped within me. Then I would not, after all, be doing something to make her dreadfully unhappy by fastening the guilt of murder on Renwood. Mary would not have stood in the way of revenging my father and brother's deaths, but the thought of hurting her had not been pleasant.

"I'm glad," I said, "that he isn't your father, Mary, for it will make my path easier for me to travel. I can't tell you the story, now, but I want you to know that I am only working for justice—justice for the dead of my family, most foully murdered."

The old cook smiled kind of grimly.

"I knows in my heart," she murmurs, "that right will win in the end. It allus does."

Just then we hear a stream of cuss words from inside the house, and Renwood tears out to us without his hat, a bunch of papers in one hand that he shakes above his head like a madman.

"There's something crooked here," he roars. "That document Leary comes out to the ranch for is gone. He must have been here—or some one else stole it."

The old lady isn't afraid to face him. She walks up to her employer, and shakes a brown, withered finger under his nose.

"I've been cook on this yer ranch and some others for some time—but I ain't been called a liar and a thief yet, and I won't stand for it," she storms. "Leary waren't at the ranch after he left yesterday, and nobody has been monkeying round your papers, not that I know about."

Renwood's eyes narrows, and I am sure that he is itching for action. But my rep doesn't appeal to him, none, so he uses polite tactics first.

"Mr. Flint," he says, "aside from my girl and Carrie no one was out here at the ranch yesterday except you and your bunkie, Shorty.

"I hopes you take it nice; but would you oblige my peace of mind by consenting to a search?"

Here was where I could help myself by playing the innocent.

"Mr. Renwood," I says, "I would not take that as friendly from everybody, but I can appreciate your feeling in losing a foreman and a val'able document in the same time. I obliges you by going into the bunk house, and you can go through me if you like."

"Thanks," he said abruptly, and we adjourns to the bunk house, where three of Renwood's cow-punchers are laying around resting up.

I takes off my boots, throws my hat on a cot, and stands with my gun belt in one hand and the butt of the weapon in easy position to be reached. Being searched is one thing, but allowing yerself to be disarmed is entirely different.

I thinks I am among friends, if suspicious ones, but I ain't going to walk in a trap without my shooting iron handy.

You may assume they searched me from head to foot, even tickling the soles of my feet to see that I ain't got a paper concealed in my socks.

I took it all plumb patient, figuring that was the best way to do. After they'd exhausted every place a paper might be hid they gives me up as a bad job, and I slings my belt around my middle and puts my boots back on agin.

"I wouldn't do this for every one," I said to Renwood. "I hopes you understand that friendliness, not force, makes me go through with this search."

"Yes, I does," he says bitter like, "and I apologize. There is a mystery here that is too deep for me, up to the present time, and when I solve it there is going to be some one to pay. I have been double crossed, all right, but I just can't figure how."

As I left the bunk room he draws the three cow-punchers close to him and starts whispering, but I can't hear what he says, and knows that I am not meant to.

A few minutes later, as I am sitting on a bench talking to Mary, I see three men on horseback streak toward Gorge City, and I bet a dollar to two bits that my guess is correct.

Those hombres has been instructed, I thinks, to ride like blazes to Gorge City and in some way search Shorty and the room we occupies at the hotel.

Renwood comes out and watches me closely to see if the departure of his men means anything to me. Now, I observes, if I makes an excuse and tries to leave and beat 'em to town, it will shore look as if I wanted to warn my partner.

I must trust to Shorty having been bright enough to hide that paper where

same cannot be found. I know the little cuss is cunning, and this is the time for him to show he can use what's under his hair.

So I lounges back on the bench and rolls a cigarette as if time meant nothing to me, nor those cow-punchers heading for town as if old Nick was after 'em.

I starts to tell Mary some experiences of riding stagecoach out of Tombstone, of the holdups we encounters, and brushes with the Injuns. Perhaps this is old stuff to Renwood, for after listening disgusted for a few minutes he turns on his heel and goes indoors agin.

"Mebbe in awhile I expect to be heading back to the Southland once more, Mary," I tells her. "You would like the people down there, I think, better than up thisaway. More friendly, and the sun shines warmer.

"The hills is brimming of color and romance; I'd get tired purty quick of these long, tiresome stretches of prairie they has up here. I has a duty to perform—and when that is over, I will leave."

Mary Renwood listens to me and sighs.

"I've been longing to get away this last year, with a consuming longing that possesses me like fire. But what can a lone girl do. I tell you, Harry, I didn't really realize then, but the reason I eloped with Dick was mostly to get away.

"He was a nice boy, but I didn't what the story books call love him. I told you my stepfather's urging for me to give in to the idea of marrying Deveture—and if things get worse, I'll be tempted to do something desperate—though I don't know what."

"Mary," I tells her, "mebbe in striving toward my own end I can help yours. Clutch fast to hope for a week or so; events is going to move fast. If I'm not mistaken, I've thought out a way to move 'em, and luck is playing on my side."

I pressed her hand, and I thought she returned the pressure.

"You give me confidence, Harry, but don't be reckless. Take good care of yourself."

In return I patted my six-gun.

"This is my little protector," I said. "And it ain't gone back on me yet. 'Sides, I'm scheming this trip; to win this deal needs more than a lightning draw."

"Oh, Harry, you have the easier part," Mary says. "Nothing is so hard as sitting back and waiting. But women, I suppose, should be accustomed to it by now; it is what they've always done."

"And it helps, too," I ventures, "when a feller feels a gal is waiting for him."

She smiles faintly, but I didn't go any further.

I figured, taking the play I was going to make into consideration, that it would not be fair.

"When this is all over," I tell her, getting to my feet, "and I'm ready to ride south, Mary, I'm coming out here to the ranch and ask you a question."

"I'll be waiting," she replies, slow and soft.

Looking deep into her eyes, I mutters a good-by and tells her to think of me. Then I approaches the hitch-post, figuring I have let time enough go by to show Renwood that I wasn't plotting against him.

I see him peering out from the window of his office, but he does not come out to see me off. That doesn't bother me none. I waves a hand to Mary and starts away at an easy canter, nothing like the dust-eating pace his men had taken.

That don't mean. however, I'm not worrying about that paper Shorty tells me he is going to hide so clever, for I is. After all, on a party's person, and in a room like we has in the hotel, there isn't so many places to hide a document that they can't be counted over and checked off.

If that paper was discovered it would be proof that one of us had killed Leary and fighting Deveture and his gang.

We'd be lucky to get out of Gorge City alive, and even if we did, my mission of revenge would have proved a dismal failure.

After I get out of sight of the ranch I make somewhat better time, but Renwood's cow-punchers has an hour's start on me. I make no attempt to catch up with them. This was a case when I had to trust to Shorty's luck and judgment; he had proved to me he was no fool, but always showed pure gold when the test came.

Reaching Gorge City, I goes direct to the hotel, leaves my hoss at the hitch-post and trails direct to room twelve. As I expected, Shorty was very much in, laying down on the bed smoking a cigarette.

"Did you have some visitors?" I asked, and then watched him chuckle fit to kill.

"Gimme the story straight," I continues. "I'm in no mood for laughter."

"All right, Harry, just as you say. These here cow-punchers of Renwood's find me over to the sheriff's shack, and tells me that they wants to see me most secret. Guessing what they wants, and ready to oblige, so suspicions will be stamped out of that score, I acts dumb enough to please, and accompanies them up here to our room.

"They is slow as blazes, and I could have plugged them easy as a lazy man's target. Instead I let them throw down on me and obliges with a thorough search.

"Boy, they didn't leave me with no more privacy than a newborn babe. They searches every inch of my clothes and boots, even cuts into the heels to see they ain't hollow.

"Then they starts on the room, and you'd have laughed yourself sick seeing them trying to find loose boards on the floor. When they is quite through I asks 'em what it is all about.

"They apologizes humble enough, and hopes I won't hold the search ag'in' 'em, that they are only following orders. Of course I knows what they is after all the time, but I plays stupid."

I grinned back at him, shorely much relieved.

"Not hard for you to do that," I drawls. "And now, you wise old owl, tell your bunkie where the paper was all the time. You worried a flock of gray hairs into my head."

Shorty sat up, threw his cigarette away, and started to pour tobacco from a bag onto a sheet of rice paper.

"The cow-punchers was looking at what they was searching for all the time," he laughs, "only they never knew it. I rolled the document into a wad and hid it in the middle of this bag of tobacco. I made a smoke while they was here, and guess it took 'em off their guard, for they never thought to peep into the bag."

I looks at Shorty with all the admiration I can muster.

"That comes," I tells him, "from having man-sized brains."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LYNCHING BEE.

WHEN I canters into the Oriental at four o'clock the faro dealers were just changing shift. Deveture was nowhere in sight. Staying up till dawn, I presume he slept most of the day.

"First since last night," I said to the barkeep, and he slides a glass and a bottle of Old Jordan toward me.

"Did you read the *Gorge City Weekly*, out this afternoon?" he asks slyly.

"No, I never read when I get info'mation by word of mouth. What's the news?"

"The paper says there's a secret

Vig'lance Committee been formed here in town, to get rid of all undesirables."

"Humph! Who goes first, you or me?" I laughs, sending that drink down the alley.

The barkeep smiles, a laugh bein' too much to expect from such an aud'ence.

"That Mark Tucker feller had better be careful, or they'll be dating time around here by his funeral."

I grins.

"There's another missionary yelping for law and order, I hear, Hanly Brown, owner of the gen'ral store."

"Yeah, him, too," agrees the barkeep. "These reformers are never satisfied. When a town's wide open everybody spends money, everybody has money; tighen things up and gold gets as scarce as hens' teeth. I seen it work out that way several times."

"You're right, friend," I said and, pleased, he wants me to have another drink, but I told him I was going slow.

A few minutes later Deveture strolled in and went to his usual chair no one else ever occupied. He was pale and worried, and had nothing to say to me. I stalled around the rest of the afternoon and evening, feeling as if I was paid to do sentry duty more than anything else.

That night when I went to the hotel Shorty waren't there, so I crawled to bed and was asleep before he turned in.

The next morning, strolling down to Mosby's, I found that party bubbling over with excitement.

"You owe me ten dollars, Flint," he orates. "I tried out my invention and it works."

"Well, make two sets of same, and charge them to me, along with that ten I owes you. Can you have 'em ready by to-morrow afternoon, ready for delivery?"

He looked a bit bewildered.

"Can't you take me into your confidence?" he asks. "I feels you have something on, and I'm blamed curious."

"You'll know everything in good time, but you'll have to hold your hosses."

"Well, I'll trust you and go ahead. By late to-morrow afternoon they'll be ready for you."

"And now, Mosby," I adds, "you will never regret that inspiration of yours."

Leaving his harness and blacksmith shop I hikes quietly over to the *Gorge City Weekly*, a little shack down the street, where I am lucky enough to find Mark Tucker, the fighting journalist, of which there was many in the West. They fought to get subscribers and had to battle to keep 'em.

I had no trouble getting taken into a private room and tells him my idea.

"It's great," I tells him, "and it can't fail. If you see any holes in it I'd be obliged if you would tell me."

He pushed back a lock of hair that had fallen over his pale forehead, and regarded his ink-stained fingers.

"I'm a gambler as well as a journalist," he says, "and in a case like this one has to take chances. I would sacrifice myself to get Deveture and Renwood, see them punished for the murders they have commited in cold blood."

"Will Hanly Brown agree with you? I understand he has the same ideas on reform."

"He will do anything I say to clean up Gorge City—why we've been risking our lives right along. I never heard of a plan like yours, but I'm game."

"That's what I've been counting on," I told him. "It takes a brave man to string with me."

In response to my question where he lived, he told me his lodgings are upstairs.

"And Brown's rooms are over his place of business?"

"Correct. Both of us are cutting down expenses," said Tucker with a smile.

"Then tell him to be ready to-mor-

row night, same as yourself. I'm sure everything will go through like clockwork."

He shakes me by the hand and bows me out, a brave man if they ever was one. But, of course, you can do anything with a reformer if you lets him think you're going to get successful results.

At about four o'clock, when Deveture shows up, I am waiting for him.

"Is there somewhere we can talk quiet?" I whispers, mysterious. "I have something very important to tell you."

Without a word he led me into that little card room used by Renwood when I first met him.

"Now shoot," he says. "What's on your mind? The trouble is that people that work for me are afraid to tell me things."

I leaned over ontil I was talking directly into his ear.

"Fact is, I heard—don't ask me when or where—that there is to be some fireworks provided by the newly formed Vig'lance Committee, and they are to be set off this coming week. I have an ideer. I've been something of a strangling expert myself, boss, in the past, and I think up one good scheme to stop all this outburst of the law-and-order crowd."

"Go ahead; I'm listening," he replies, eyes all intent on me.

"Put me in charge, place Renwood and a few men under me, and I'll guarantee to lynch that newspaper feller Tucker and Hanly Brown higher than kites, with no trouble or fuss, and take the name and the blame. That's the only way to nip this law-and-order nonsense in the bud. Of course," I added, "I will need some money, but—"

He waves that aside and sets for a full minute gazing into space.

"You're right, Flint," he says at last, banging the table with his fist. "One must fight fire with fire."

"There's only one thing I demands," I insists. "If I'm to be the head of this lynching bee, I must be obeyed. No shooting, yelling, or noise of any kind that might arouse the gen'ral populace.

The trick is to be done in secrecy and in my own way."

He smiled. "Flint, you're an artist after my own heart. I only wish you had breezed into Gorge City long ago. Lay your plans and I'll give out iron orders that you be obeyed, on penalty of my lasting displeasure."

"To-morrow night, late," I explains, "have Renwood here with three men, and let them be placed under my command. I'll run this little collar party. We kidnap Tucker and Brown, and if you want to traipse along you'll see one of the smoothest jobs ever pulled off.

"I'm proud of my work, and you'll be, too, when you see how it will be executed."

"I'll be one of the spectators," murmured Deveture evilly. "Flint, you'll never regret this."

I hoped not.

Very late the following night Mark Tucker, owner of the *Gorge City Weekly*, and Hanly Brown, proprietor of the General Store, were rudely surprised in their homes by a gang headed by me.

Neither man was yet in bed, but they might have retired within a short time.

While pointed six-guns counseled silence the two men were gagged and their arms tied to their sides. Then they were quickly led to the street and placed on horseback.

The little cavalcade galloped out of town, attracting no attention from the few folks abroad; we look like a flock of cowboys leaving town for some home ranch.

It was not original with me, perhaps, having been figured as a grim jest somewhere in the Southwest, but the type of lynching I intended was

novel to the bunch under my command.

Not a word was passed as we trailed into the semi-darkness, for Deveture had ordered silence. Five minutes' ride out of Gorge City were two big cottonwood trees that I had spotted, dimly seen now, but right for my purpose.

I scrambled up the trunk of the first tree and tied a rope with a noose at the end of it to an overhanging branch. Jumping back to earth, I mounted my hoss again and ordered everybody back to watch the fun, except one of the men to go, Mark Tucker.

I led his hoss under the branch and secured the noose around the neck carefully.

Then I kicked the man's feet out of the stirrups. As his hands were tied behind his back, the joke would come when the hoss started to walk away.

He'd slip off, naturally, lynched by his own mount.

Two minutes later a black figure dangles from that cottonwood tree, at the end of a rope that still swings a little. Tucker's hoss, unknowing, has scampered off from under him.

A hundred yards away is another tree with a convenient branch. Here I repeats the same performance with Hanly Brown. It takes longer this time, but finally Brown's mount shies at something and leaves him dangling in the darkness.

We starts back to town, single file. I was directly behind Deveture.

"If any trouble brews 'bout this, you have the satisfaction of knowing I was the chief strangler," I tells him.

"I've killed plenty in my time, Flint," he mutters, "but I must say I admires your technique. Smooth as silk, and without a wrinkle."

Renwood, behind me, was not so calm.

"I need a drink," he said huskily. "That damn quiet got on my nerves. All the lynchings I ever attended before was noisy. This one gives me the creeps."

CHAPTER XX.

LAW AND GHOSTS.

I AWOKE at dawn and tried to get out without arousing Shorty, but he grins at me from his side of the bed, next to the wall.

"Don't worry 'bout looking for them swinging bodies," he drawls. "They was removed shortly after that collar party you put on."

"Taken away by friends, eh?"

"Yeah, cut down not long after you left 'em treading on air."

"Well, cowboy, I'm riding to Fort Prescott fast as my hoss can carry me. Fork over that document."

Shorty fishes around in his tobacco bag and produces the paper, a lot the worse for wear, and I puts same for safekeeping in my back pants pocket.

"I expect to be back by four o'clock," I tells him. "Bring Renwood and Deveture out to the cottonwoods through a tale I'm afraid to come into town, and am loaded down with news."

"All right, you know Renwood is on an awful tear."

I waves him back to another forty winks, and makes a straight line for my hoss.

It is a good four and a half hours' ride across the plains to Fort Prescott, and Blackie and me makes it without incident. Arriving there, I asks directions to Judge Marlowe's home, and, receiving same talks my way in while he is at breakfast.

After making apologies for disturbing him I tell the judge who I really am—Harry Hawley—and the story that goes with it, how I'm sure I have a case against Renwood and Deveture.

First there is my being an eyewitness to the murders, and that I can positively identify Renwood, then there is the document, and to crown all I has Dawson to turn State's evidence.

The old judge listens while I tells the entire tale of my mission of revenge and is even amused at the plan I outlined.

"You indeed have a case, young man, but who are you expecting to serve warrants, if I make them out? The peace officers of Gorge City are corrupt, it is known."

"My ideer, sir, would be to borrow your sheriff and a deputy, and with their help and that of my bunkie, kidnap those two murderers and land 'em safe behind the bars of the county jail."

"You are bold, boy, but I like your spirit, and if Sheriff Conway allows he will take the risk I'll issue the warrants with pleasure."

Judge Marlowe sent a house boy a-running for the local peace officer, who had a fine reputation, after cleaning up Fort Prescott, once the wildest of cow-towns. Famed killers like Curley Knowles and Two-Gun Becker had been downed by him in fair fight.

When Conway stalked in, a strong frontier figure, the judge outlined my scheme to him, and he could pick no flaws in it.

"Gorge City," he drawled, "could be a purty nice town with some of that bad element rubbed out. I'll ride back with you, son, and take along a trusted deputy, Kerry Cheney, with me."

The sheriff arranged to pick up the warrants later. Then we bows out of the judge's home and wets our whistles with a little drink. After which we saunters down to Pedro's, on the edge of town, and finds Hink Dawson dead drunk in the back room.

"The best place for this sot, till the trial, is in jail," opines Conway.

He picks the man up, slings him over his shoulder, and I march with him to the county jail, which has a reg'lar keeper and everything. Conway leaves Dawson with the following instructions: "To be held till called for by Sheriff Conway."

The old boy has a sense of humor and takes the fame that stretches across three States with becoming modesty. About noon Conway obtains the warrants from Judge Marlowe, rounds up his deputy, and we arrive outside of Gorge City before the appointed hour.

We do not go into town but head our hosses for the cottonwoods where the lynchings took place. Shorty must have put over my lie about me having news but being afraid to enter the town.

At any rate, a little after the hour, the three men ride toward us, Shorty in the rear. Renwood is half-drunk, but Deveture is cold sober, yet not suspicious, apparently. Before any questions can be asked about the two strangers, Conway pulls his shooting irons and levels 'em steady.

"I has a warrant for you two gents' arrest for the murder of Thomas and Bud Hawley. Make one move and I'll drill you plumb center."

"I know you by reputation, Sheriff Conway. We'll come peaceful," said Deveture.

The deputy disarmed both men, while keeping out of the line of fire of Conway's guns, and slips handcuffs on the two of them.

Mebbe Deveture knows he is tricked, but he says not a word on that trip back to Fort Prescott. Renwood, half-drunk, wants to talk, but Deveture icily tells him to stop the lip, and he obeys.

I breathed one sigh of relief when I sees those two murderers delivered to jail, where I knew they'd be safe until the day of the trial. Fort Prescott was too hard a nut for any of the wild gangs of Gorge City to try and crack.

The jury had been picked and the prosecuting attorney, Mr. Marshall Kenne, was outlining to me just what was to be proved to them.

During the wait for the trial, Renwood's nerve had cracked. His cell had been directly next to Dawson's—at my suggestion—and hour after hour he had listened to the cow-puncher's threats of vengeance and pretty pictures

painted him of dangling at the end of a rope. Now Renwood sat beside Deveture at a table and drummed uneasily with his fingers.

The prisoners were asked what they plead in answer to the murder indictment.

"Not guilty," said their lawyer, jumping to his feet.

"Let Mr. Renwood and Mr. Deveture speak for themselves," said Judge Marlowe sternly.

At that dramatic moment the door at the farther end of the court room opened, leading from the judge's private office. A deep half-sigh, half-sob, went up from the spectators, as two men with ruffled hair and haggard faces walked slowly out, broken nooses still hanging from their necks and, raising accusing fingers, went directly toward Renwood.

The latter shrank back, covered his hands with his face, and whimpering, looked out in abject fear.

"Take them away, take them away," he screamed. "Dead men come back to haunt me. I saw them hung. Take them away; if they come nearer it will kill me. I'll confess anything. Yes, I killed the Hawleys—but Deveture put me up to it. We thought it safe—so far south."

He peered through his fingers, in dread and fascination, and saw those two figures of death standing silently facing him. Then Renwood broke into wild sobs and fainted on the table. The shock and strain had been too much for him.

Deveture sat cool and cold, although he saw the game was up.

Judge Marlowe turned to the jury.

"I trust, gentlemen, you have heard and noted Mr. Renwood's unasked-for confession. However, the trial will continue, in the sense that the prosecution will present all its evidence, and the defense will—er—do what it can."

There were snickers from the audience while Mark Tucker and Hanly Brown threw aside theatricals and adjourned to Judge Marlowe's private office again. They had been waiting for this moment, hidden in Fort Prescott, ever since being cut down from the cottonwood trees.

Weren't they lynched and by me? Yeah, in a manner of speaking, but Mosby had won his bet. Our argument had been on the fact that he claimed he could cheat death by lynching, and he had first tried out his apparatus on himself.

Mosby had invented a harness that went across a man's chest and back, under the arms, and over the shoulders. A wide collar harness was fitted with iron hooks.

Well, when I fitted a noose to a party wearing this I arranged the noose under the hooks, and though the body hung in the air, indeed, the strain and weight all fell on the shoulders. The neck was entirely free.

Yet from a short distance at night it had looked as though Mark Tucker and Hanly Brown were actually lynched, but, of course, when we kidnaped 'em they was wearing Mosby's rope neckties that wouldn't hurt. By being allowed to gently slip off a hoss there was no jerk or pull as in a common garden lynching.

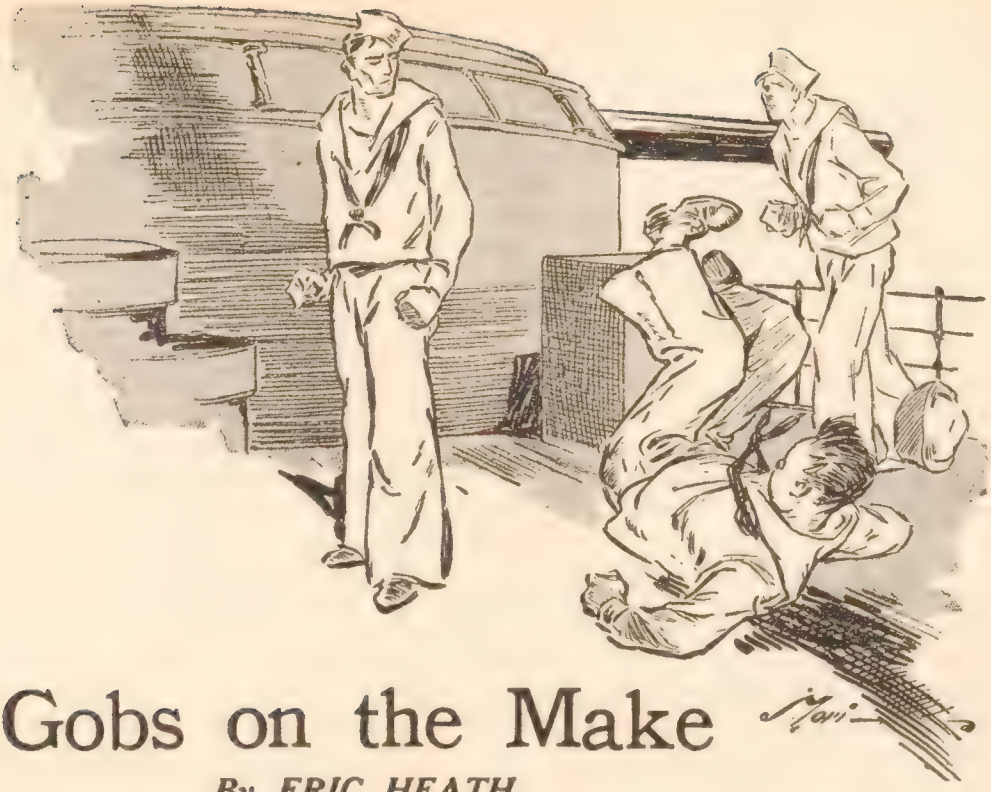
I ain't going to keep you in suspense, for Renwood's confession when he thought himself trapped by ghosts from the grave was enough for the jury, backed by all the rest of the evidence that connected both Renwood and Deveture in the conspiracy to murder.

The verdict was that they should hang. I had my revenge, and now my kinfolks could sleep easy.

On our way south to claim that three thousand, five hundred dollars on deposit in Jacksontown, we passed the Renwood ranch, and I had Shorty ride ahead.

I recalled to Mary my picture of the southland, and asked her to ride away with me, and marry me, and she did.

THE END



Gobs on the Make

By ERIC HEATH

The tale of three sailors and the plan two of them had to clean up on the third

A BLAZING tropical sun had rendered the afternoon drills aboard the gunboat Falcon unusually fatiguing. At eight bells, when the welcome call "knock off all work!" sounded, most of the members of the crew searched for shady spots on the port side of the vessel and stretched out for a nap.

The Falcon, having just been put into service in the Pacific fleet, was making a practice run to Honolulu. She was living up to her builders' specifications and plowing jauntily through the placid waters at a speed of better than twenty-two knots.

Andy Bevans and his buddy, Fred Hankins, returning from below, where they had gone for cigarettes, found the choice spots on the deck occupied.

As they rounded one of the gun turrets, Andy stumbled against a pair of outstretched legs and fell forward onto his face with a thud.

Sam Black, nicknamed "Blacky," angry at being disturbed during his well-earned rest, sprang up just as Andy got to his feet.

"What's the idea, runt?" he demanded, menacingly.

"Who's a runt?" growled Andy.

"You are!" returned Blacky, doubling up his fists.

Before Hankins could interfere, the two men were engaged in a rough and tumble mêlée.

Blacky, tall and wiry, had the advantage over his short, plump adversary.

Fighting in close quarters, he landed several effective jabs on Andy's solar plexus.

As Andy tried to guard his abdomen, Blacky changed his tactics and closed Andy's left eye with a well-aimed left.

Andy tried to pull away to regain his breath, and in so doing laid himself open to the coolly calculated blows of his opponent. A neatly delivered crack on the chin sent him sprawling.

Blacky grinned down at him, then turned and faced Hankins.

"Do you want some, too?" he demanded.

"Your damn right, I do, you big bully!" returned Hankins.

As the two men squared away, Andy, who had stumbled to the railing nursing his bruised eye, gave a muttered warning:

"Here comes a gold striper—look out!"

Blacky and Hankins lowered their arms. Blacky squatted down with his back against the gun turret and gazed dreamily off across the water, while Hankins joined Andy at the railing.

When the officer had passed, Hankins muttered:

"Come on. We'll get a piece of beefsteak from the cook to put on that eye of yours."

After procuring a bit of raw meat for a poultice, the two men went below, and Hankins proceeded to bind up Andy's shiner.

"I'll get that big stiff yet!" muttered Andy, wrathfully.

"And just wait until I get a crack at him!" returned Hankins. "He's always acted like a dirty snob ever since he came on board at San Diego."

Their threats of vengeance against Blacky did not cease until they heard the mess call for supper.

II.

THE next day Andy and Hankins again brought up the subject of their enmity against Blacky. Andy, suffering under the stabs of a barrage of sarcastic comments from his buddies concerning his black eye, was insistent that he once more engage Blacky in combat.

"But he licked you, fair and square, there's no doubt of that," remonstrated Hankins. "I'm the baby that should take him on. I'm nearer his size than you are, anyway. I'm gonna get Jake Quarles to train me. You know, he used to be welterweight champion of the fleet. I'll challenge that bozo just as soon as I get in A1 condition—and, boy, what I won't do to him!"

After further argument, Andy finally gave in, and it was decided that after Hankins had received a couple of weeks' training he should fight, and, in his own words: "Lick the tar out of Blacky."

"I'll hunt him up and give him warning right away," announced Hankins.

"What you wanta do that for?" demanded Andy.

"It's the psychology of the thing—if you get what I mean," Hankins replied, condescendingly. "I figure he's yellow, and when he starts thinkin' about what's gonna happen to him in a coupla weeks, he'll get more scared every day—just like waiting to be hanged, or something like that."

"Yeh," returned Andy, dubiously. "Maybe that's right."

After Hankins had left him to hunt up Blacky, Andy leaned against the railing and pictured in his mind the forthcoming battle. Just as he reached the point where Blacky lay on the deck, bruised and gory, ready to be doused with a bucket of salt water, Hankins returned, his swarthy features portraying agitation.

Grabbing Andy's arm, Hankins whispered:

"Come on below. I got something to show you."

Arriving in a quiet corner of the berth deck, Hankins pulled out a sheet of paper and handed it to Andy.

"Read that!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "Blacky was standing at the rail. I was just going to spill the works to

him about the fight when he reached in his pocket for his tobacco and that paper dropped out. I picked it up and happened to read the headlines. Then I stuck it inside my blouse and sneaked away before he saw me."

While he was talking, Andy had straightened out the paper and was staring at it with widening eyes.

The handbill, for such it was, contained a picture of Blacky. Above the picture, across the top, in large letters, was the caption:

$2,500 REWARD!

Underneath the picture, in smaller type, was the following:

> Sam Black, alias "Slim Muldoon," wanted for participating in a train robbery near Banbury, Texas. The above reward will be paid to any one giving information which will lead to his capture and conviction.
>
> Description: age, 24 years; height, 5′ 11″; weight, 170 lbs.; brown eyes, black hair, hook nose; two gold teeth in upper jaw.
>
> Notify Chief of Police,
> JOHN A. HEARN,
> Banbury, Texas.

"Well, what do you know about that!" breathed Andy, as he returned the handbill to Hankins. "A train robber! Who'd a thunk it!"

"I knew he was a tough egg," Hankins replied. "You see, he probably joined the navy because he thought it would be a good way to hide out."

"Twenty-five hundred dollars—umm, umm, baby!" murmured Andy. "What couldn't I do with that much dough!"

"How d'yuh get that way?" demanded Hankins. "Twelve fifty apiece, you mean."

"Jumpin' terrapin!" exclaimed Andy. "What a sweet come-uppance that bird would get if we turned him over to the police!"

"Well, why not?" demanded Hankins. "He's a crook, ain't he? He's a disgrace to the navy, ain't he? An' he socked you in the eye, didn't he? Why shouldn't we turn him over and get the reward, I'd like to know?"

Andy felt of his sore optic.

"You're darn right!" he spluttered. "Why, it's our *duty* to hand him over to the police. We'll do the job as soon as we get to Honolulu."

"We'll do nothing of the sort," growled Hankins. "Use your brains, if you got any. We'll wait until we get back to San Diego. Then we'll get the jack right quick. If we turn him over at Honolulu, there'd have to be cablegrams sent and all kinds of red tape. It might be next Christmas before we got the reward."

"Yeh, that's right," agreed Andy. Then he frowned. "But suppose he gets away from us before we get back?"

Hankins rubbed his chin thoughtfully, then he chuckled.

"Listen, brother, this is what we'll do—we'll make friends with him, see—"

"Make friends?" broke in Andy.

"You heard me," went on Hankins, "and shut up until I get through, will you? As I said, we'll play up to him. We've got to do it in order to keep him under our eyes all the time. We can't give him no chance to give us the slip before we get back to San Diego.

"Why, do you realize that big hunk of boloney is worth twenty-five hundred dollars to us? We've got to stick to him and kid him along—just like we'd keep hold of a sack of twenty dollar gold pieces, if we had it. Yessiree—that baby spells a fortune to us, buddy, I'll tell the world."

"Shall we go an' give him the glad hand right away?" asked Andy.

"Good idea," replied Hankins.

III.

To the gratification of both of them, Blacky accepted their apologies and proffers of friendship by extending his hand and booming:

"That's all right, buddies. This

damn hot weather makes me kinda peevish sometimes. Just forget it. And to show you my heart's in the right place, I'll take you to a dump I know about in Honolulu and blow you to one of the swellest feeds you ever ate. Then I'll show you the town."

"You'll show us the town," returned Hankins, "but we'll pay for the feed, see?" His tone was firm.

"Oh, all right—if you feel that way about it," agreed Blacky.

He paused and frowned, then went on confidentially: "To tell you the truth, boys, I got a wireless from my little sister back in Santa Rose. She's been sick an' wants me to send her some money from Honolulu. Poor kid! And the hell of it is that I've only got five dollars left outa my last pay. I don't know what to do about sending her that jack."

Hankins gave Andy a meaning look, then exclaimed:

"Well, if that's all that's worryin' you, Blacky, I've got nearly a hundred bucks saved up and Andy here's got some. We can let you have a hundred and you can cable it to your sister when we get to Honolulu."

"Sure!" agreed Andy.

He chuckled inwardly. Wasn't Blacky worth twenty-five hundred to them? It would be a hundred well spent to keep on the good side of him and make it all the easier to steer him over to police headquarters in San Diego.

"Well, that's sure mighty fine of you fellows!" Blacky exclaimed. "I can let you have the money back in three or four months. And to think I was rotten enough to pick a fight with two swell guys like you!"

"Forget it," admonished Hankins.

"Sure—forget it," echoed Andy.

IV.

THREE days later, the Falcon rounded Diamond Head and came to anchor in Pearl Harbor.

At four thirty, Andy, Hankins and Blacky rejoiced at learning that they were among the fortunate ones to be allowed shore leave that night.

As a motor boat bore them landward, the three men took in the surrounding landscape with admiring eyes.

The sinking sun had painted the bulk of Diamond Head with tints of orange and yellow. To the north, rice fields and plantations stood out like patchwork quilts against the slopes of Koolau Mountains.

Straight ahead lay the docks, with ships and steamers moored beside long sheds; and beyond the far-famed Punch Bowl could be discerned.

As the trio pushed their way across the wharf through throngs of Hawaiians, Japanese, Portuguese and Americans, they were greeted with low "Alohas," and pretty brown-skinned girls encircled their necks with bright colored leis.

Upon reaching the business district, Andy and Hankins placed in Blacky's hand the hundred dollars they had agreed to loan him.

"Thanks a million, fellows," he said gratefully. "Wait here until I duck into the telegraph office."

After he had disappeared, Andy said, dubiously:

"Hank, do you think we'll ever see that jack again?"

"Will we?" returned Hankins, grinning. "I'll tell the world—and twenty-four hundred to boot. It's just an investment, boy, don't worry."

When Blacky finally reappeared, they joined arms and he led the way to Nuuanu Avenue, which they traversed until they came to a low, widespread frame house which stood well back amid a grove of papayas, monkey-pods and kukui trees.

"This is Portuguese Pete's dump, what I was tellin' you about," explained Blacky.

Upon entering they found themselves in a large room with white plas-

tered walls and with a single table in the center. At this table were seated four Portuguese sailors, eating and drinking.

Portuguese Pete, a short, fat and very swarthy individual with sparkling black eyes, greeted the three gobs with bows and smiles. He seated them at the table.

In short order various exotic dishes were set before them, such as squid tentacles, candle-nuts, raw mullet, poi and coconut milk.

It soon became evident to the three men that the Portuguese sailors had also been served with liquor, for, as the meal progressed, they became more and more boisterous.

One of them, a tall, vicious-looking man with large hawklike nose and darting black eyes, kept casting malicious glances at the blue-jackets and every once in awhile would turn to his companions and speak in a low voice.

"That bird's lookin' for trouble," muttered Blacky.

"He's sayin' something nasty about us," agreed Hankins, glowering across the table.

It is quite possible that the meal would have ended peaceably, if it had not been for Andy's clumsiness in handling oysters on the half shell. With unwarranted lack of etiquette, he jabbed the point of his knife into an oyster shell to loosen up the clinging mollusk.

The oyster, torn from its shell under these strenuous tactics, rose in the air, turned over several times, and landed kerflop into the gaping bosom of the ferocious-looking Portuguese sailor's blouse.

Cursing fluently in strange languages, the man arose and frantically delved for the oyster with hairy hand.

As he brought it to light, he slammed it down on the table and yelled at Andy:

"You Yankee peeg!"

Andy stared into the man's glittering eyes and gulped for a come-back. But Blacky, his countenance knotted, sprang up and leaning over the table shoved his face up close to the Portuguese and bellowed:

"Who's a Yankee pig? Who's a Yankee pig?"

The angry Portuguese gave a muttered exclamation, then brought the back of his hand against Blacky's cheek with a sharp smack.

In another instant, a miniature battle between the United States and Portugal started.

Blacky stepped on his chair and with a fierce shout launched himself across the table at his adversary.

The Portuguese tried to pull away to avoid the clutching fingers, but was not quick enough. Blacky's hands encircled his throat and the two men fell to the floor, Blacky jerking the tablecloth and the dishes in the wake of his dragging feet.

Meanwhile, Andy and Hankins, together with the three remaining Portuguese sailors, had arisen. They stared down at the writhing combatants.

Suddenly, one of the Portuguese, seeing that his comrade was being worsted, picked up a beer bottle.

Hankins saw that the man was about to brain Blacky at the first opportunity. He turned to Andy and yelled:

"Come on, kid—let's clean 'em out!"

He mounted the table and launched himself at the man holding the upraised beer bottle. With a crash that shook the house, the two men fell to the floor.

Andy, seeing that he would have to tackle the other two Portuguese single handed, decided on a different method of attack. Grabbing some heavy china plates from the floor, he began such a furious bombardment that the two Portuguese beat a retreat by crouching under the table.

"Come out, you cowards!" yelled Andy.

As he spoke, he glanced around and saw a knife flash in the hands of Blacky's opponent. Blacky was so busy pounding his clenched fists into

the man's face that he did not notice the upraised weapon.

With a cry of warning, Andy jumped across the table and caught the man's wrist. He twisted it until the bones cracked and the knife fell to the floor from the tortured sailor's limp fingers.

While the fight was waging, Portuguese Pete had rushed outside, yelling for help. As it happened, two officers from the Portuguese man-of-war lying in the harbor were strolling along in front of the house.

Portuguese Pete hurriedly explained what was happening and the two officers rushed inside, yelling commands to their men.

At the sound of their superior officers' voices, the four Portuguese gave up the struggle and sullenly lined up at attention.

"Come on," muttered Blacky to Andy and Hankins, "let's beat it." He stepped quickly through an open window onto a veranda, closely followed by his two companions.

Once outside, the three men sprang over the porch railing and darted through the grove to the road.

"Boy, boy!" chuckled Blacky, as they slowed up to a walk. "Some scrap!"

"Why in the devil did them officers have to show up for?" growled Hankins. "I was just gettin' started good."

"Say, fellows," broke in Andy, "do you know we didn't pay for the eats—and we sure wrecked poor old Pete's dishes."

"Yeh," said Blacky, "I guess we'd better get back to the ship before the cops run us down."

Reluctantly, they made their way to the wharf, turning their backs on the gay night life of the city.

V.

Two days later the Falcon hoisted anchor and moved slowly out of Pearl Harbor.

To their chagrin, Andy, Blacky and Hankins had received no further opportunity to go ashore. Neither had they heard anything further of their escapade at Portuguese Pete's.

Once well out at sea, the old régime aboard ship was resumed, with the exception that the drills were shortened and more time was allotted to the men for polishing brass, swabbing decks and scraping paint.

It was not until they were nearing San Diego that either Andy or Hankins brought up the subject of turning Blacky over to the police. Then, one night, Hankins said abruptly:

"Well, two days more, buddy, and we collect the reward."

"Yeh," grunted Andy. He rubbed his chin nervously, then said: "Too bad we've got to do it. Blacky's a good scrapper. I kinda like him, the more I see of him."

"Of course, a train robber has to be a good fighter," returned Hankins. "An' it ain't so much what we want to do. We gotta turn him over. Ain't we got that hundred smackers invested in him? An' ain't it our *duty?*"

"I suppose so," sighed Andy. He turned away abruptly and went below.

Hankins gazed thoughtfully down into the swirling water. As a matter of fact, he disliked turning Blacky over to the police as much as Andy did—but once he had decided upon a course of action, he stubbornly adhered to it.

The Falcon arrived in San Diego harbor in the middle of the night. It was Andy's and Hankins's watch below and slumbering peacefully, they were not cognizant that they had reached the home port until the bugle sounded reveille at five-thirty in the morning.

After breakfast, they met by appointment near the forward gun turret.

"Well, Andy," began Hankins, as he lighted a cigarette, "right after four-thirty you and me and Blacky go ashore and then we do the dirty work."

"Got that handbill safe?" asked Andy.

"I'll tell the world," responded Hankins, slapping the pocket of his middy. Then his eyes narrowed and he stared at the motor-boat which was chugging away from the ship. "By golly!" he exclaimed, "ain't that Blacky?"

The two men ran to the railing.

"It sure is," agreed Andy. "Look! He's waving his hand to us. What's the idea?"

They stared at the retreating boat until a voice sounded behind them.

"Here's a letter for you fellows." A member of the gunner's crew shoved an envelope into Hankins's hand and strolled away whistling.

Hankins looked at the envelope with puzzled eyes, then he tore it open and took out a sheet of paper.

As he read what was written on it, his face assumed an expression of mingled anger and amusement.

"Stung!" he muttered.

"What is it?" demanded Andy.

"Listen," growled Hankins, "I'll read it to you. It's from our little friend Blacky:

"DEAR BUDDIES:

"I put in for a transfer to an oil tanker some time ago. My request was granted and I'll be gone by the time you get this. I just wanted to thank you for the hundred and tell you how much I enjoyed your company on the voyage. I wouldn't bother to show that handbill to the police if I were you—you see, I had it printed by a friend of mine in San Diego. It's what we call 'The Old Navy Game,' see?

"All you got to do is drop one of them handbills where some bird that's got it in for you can pick it up—and from then on he'll give you his shirt, thinking he'll collect a big reward for your hide. Get me?

"Well, no hard feelings anyway, boys. I really needed that hundred. Good luck.

BLACKY."

"Why—the low-down, dirty double-crosser!" cried Andy. "The damned swindler!"

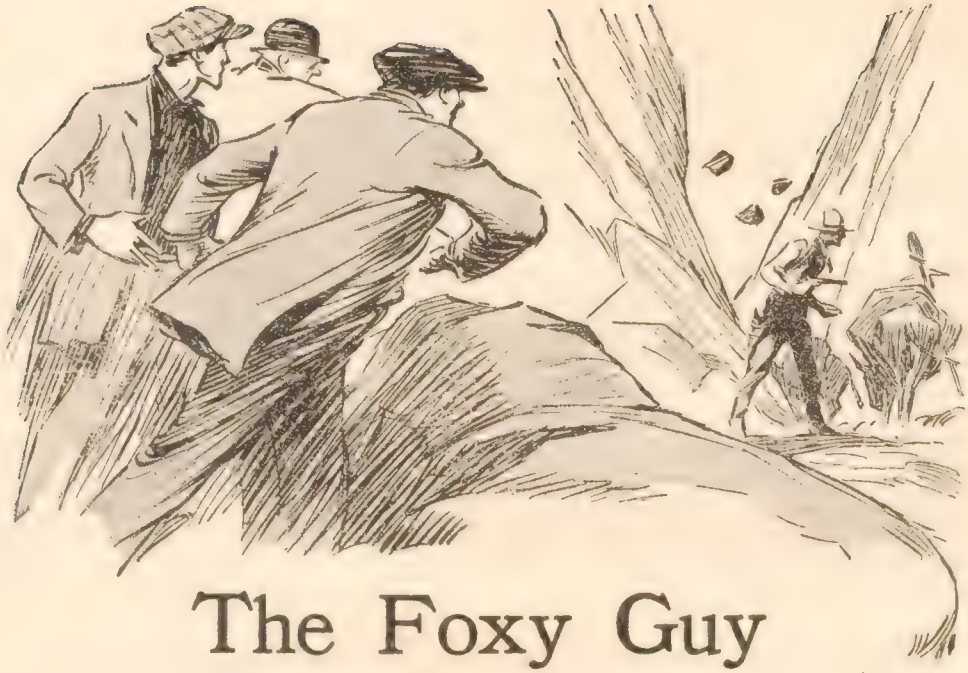
Hankins chuckled. "What a smart baby! And what a pair of suckers we've been!"

Andy did not enter into his merriment.

"But, say," he demanded, "what'll we do—"

"What'll we do?" broke in Hankins. "I'll tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna have some handbills printed showin' me to be a murderer, with five thousand dollars reward for my carcass, dead or alive—that's what I'm gonna do!"

THE END



The Foxy Guy

By O. C. TRELEAVEN

The man who thought he couldn't be outsmarted, and the ignominious finish to the slick coup he had planned

THE night was hot and sultry and still; breathless. Up around the peak of Thunder Mountain heat lightning flashed intermittently. Down in the Pass of Rocks below three men crouched, silent save when they whispered together nervously. They shielded glowing cigarettes behind cupped hands.

Their nervousness was caused more by the fact that they, city crooks, were apprehensive of the silence and mystery of the high, dark places of the West than because of the crime they were about to commit.

"Ditch them pills," one of them whispered suddenly and hoarsely. "It's pretty near time now. I heard him say he'd leave Purdy around nine o'clock."

Two cigarettes were crushed into the dirt underfoot.

"If *I* was running this job we wouldn't have smoked a pill," one of them, a young yegg who was known as The Fox or, more popularly, The Foxy Guy, answered in a sneering monotone. "The smell travels far on a still night. Ain't yeh learned that yet, Vic?"

A large, dark shape behind a bowlder moved abruptly and a big man slid noiselessly over to The Fox.

"Oh! If *you* was runnin' this job, heh?" Vic Jasey growled. "Yeh wouldn't let us smoke, eh? You figure nobody's got any brains but The Fox, do yeh? Well, ne' mind that. I'm the big boss, see? And if yeh don't like it, what y' going to do about it? Heh?"

The sharp, pointed face of The Fox grew deceptively smooth and guileless.

"Could pull outa the deal, I guess," he snickered in a nasal tone. "But I

ain't that kind of a guy. I'll stick, Vic."

Vic Jasey and "Snooty" Slusser were deceived; The Fox knew that, and his sharp features hardened. Try to play The Fox for a fall guy, would they? Thought he didn't know they had it framed to squeal on him if the job failed to-night, did they? They figured they could frame him easily, and get clear themselves, because he was wanted for murder back East, while they were only second rate "box" crackers.

They thought he was asleep, did they, when Vic had come in the room last night, and whispered to Snooty Slusser that he'd overheard talk of young Alf Lowring's starting to-night to look for a bunch of gold hidden near a gravel claim, which was located and described on a map the young guy's father had drawn just before he had been waylaid and shot to death.

So they thought they could outsmart The Fox! Well, just wait. Jus-s-s-t wait! That's all! There'd be the three of them in the hills together with this gold—when they'd found it.

He grinned and patted the automatic pistol, flat against his lean hip. There'd be three of them, two second-rate dubs and The Fox, fastest gunman in Chi. Then there'd be only one. And that one The Fox!

Suddenly there came the ring of a shod hoof striking rock, somewhere on the trail up the side of Crazy Horse Cañon, and they stiffened to immobility. They listened intently and heard it again; this time accompanied by the voice of a man.

"That's him!" Vic Jasey's tone was excitedly exultant. "Now remember; don't use your gats! There's men camped up ahead of us a ways, and if they heard shots they might come bustin' inta this. Just knock him kickin' all nice and quiet with the rocks yeh got, go through him and get the map. Then we heave him over the cañon and beat it for the gold."

A dark shape loomed up between the two towering masses of granite from which the pass took its name. It was a mule and was followed closely by two others, a few feet apart. Then came a young man, slender, youthful in the way he swung up the steep trail.

"Get moving faster, you Jerry," he called cheerily. "Think we got all night to—"

Abruptly he ceased speaking. Whether he had heard something that alarmed him, some suspicious sound, he did not know. But something had startled him; perhaps it was trail instinct, an inborn sense of intuition.

He stopped short, and in one swift, dragging move of his arm, threw a gun out of its holster and held it before him, at the hip, the barrel swinging gently from side to side.

The men behind their bowlders did not see the gun; perhaps they started their attack as it was drawn. As one man, the three rose from behind their rocks, their hands lifted high above their heads. At least one of the several rocks found the mark.

The young man fell like a slaughtered steer. The only sound he made was a suddenly expelled breath that was like a sharp grunt. But his alert fingers contracted as the rock struck him and the heavy-calibered gun fired once.

Its roaring message was made louder by the rock walls of the pass. Echoes of the shot cracked far out over Crazy Horse Cañon.

The Fox sneered viciously. "There goes your slick plans, Vic. Yeh didn't want any shootin', did yeh?"

"Shut up!" big Vic Jasey snarled ferociously. "You think you're so foxy! Get busy and help frisk this bird! Yeh wanta stay here all night?"

But a most expert search failed to disclose any papers other than a book of wheat straws.

Then, far ahead, up the trail beyond the pass, a man's voice was heard: "Hey, down there! Hello-o-o!" Then

came a single shot, followed by two others at regular intervals.

"I knew it!" Vic Jasey snarled. "I told yeh! That's some guy what heard the shot and—"

"Le's —le's get outa here," Slusser chattered in quick panic. "This job's got my goat. What business has a smart kid like me got way up here in this Gawd-forsaken country, anyway—"

He turned and ran down the trail, and after a momentary hesitation the others followed.

"Meet at the room. Separate when we get to town and gum-shoe in," Vic Jasey grunted as he caught up to Slusser.

The Fox ran also, but gradually slowed his pace until the others were far ahead. Then he stopped and instantly turned back toward the spot he had just quitted.

Not for nothing had Johnny Pike been called The Fox. Very little escaped his small, roving eyes and his large, pointed ears. And so it was he was the only one to hear a mutter from the wounded man on the ground while Jasey and Slusser were panic-stricken and ready to flee.

And now he was going back on the chance that Alf Lowring would say something that he, The Fox, could use in the search for the buried gold, which he had by no means abandoned. That map must be somewhere, he reasoned coolly; maybe the young guy might spill some dope about it. And so he scurried back.

Young Alf Lowring groaned in his unconsciousness and flung out an arm. The Fox, who crouched by him, slipped out of the way of the arm and intently watched Lowring's contorted face.

The wounded man groaned again and muttered thickly and in a jerky manner:

"Jack. Bad luck holds. You—take —map. Go—"

The Fox grinned. So some guy, some friend, knew about this trip after the gold? Some one Lowring trusted? And Vic Jasey, the big dud, thought he was wise, leading the bunch out here on a wild-goose chase to glom a map that wasn't on this young guy at all!

Well, he gloated, he'd show 'em! He knew how to frame Vic and Slusser—get them outa the way. Then wait till this Jack guy started out and follow him to the buried gold and the lost mine. Not so bad!

Suddenly he threw up his head and listened. Voices. Coming down the trail! Like a shadow he fled.

He remained outside the town of Purdy until early morning. Then he scribbled a note:

> DEAR MR. SHERIF:
> Here's a hot tip. Look threw your circulars and find the mugs of Vic Jasey and Snooty Slusser. They are wanted by the dicks in Chi and New York. Then you go up to room 3 in the Dewey House here in town and make the pinch while they are snoozin'.
> A FRIEND.

Then he started toward town. A small boy appeared, driving a cow down the road, and The Fox overtook him.

"Wanta make some jack, son?" he asked with a warm smile.

The lad looked up and nodded shyly.

"*All* righty! You take this here note on in to the sheriff or whatever you got for a cop in this town. Tell him I said he oughta give yeh a dollar for bringin' it. And here's a half from me. Beat it, kiddo."

Then The Fox widely circled the sleeping town and entered it at the outskirts of the opposite end, where stood a road house of questionable repute. Here he engaged the sleepy proprietor in confidential conversation, secured a room key, and went to bed.

A little later the proprietor woke him to impart the information that Vic Jasey and Snooty Slusser were in jail. The Fox chuckled to himself when he was again alone.

"Well, that's that. Now for a snooze and then a sneak outa town. The owner of the joint here will give me a pack of grub and a couple o' bottles of hooch. Then me for a hide-out somewhere along that trail until this Jack guy comes along. Maybe I am dumb, heh? Oh, yeh! I ain't no foxy guy! I'm dumb!"

II.

THERE was consternation in the town of Purdy and in the home of Alf Lowring when he was brought there by the men who had found him. They declared he must have been hit by rocks falling down the clifflike bank above the trail as they had discovered several beside him.

At first the young man had lain as one dead. But the doctor who examined him announced to the silently sympathetic crowd that Alf would live.

"Cranial fracture, possibly cerebral. Some concussion. Severe shock," the old doctor muttered briskly. "What hit him? Rock from the bank, you say? Huh? Live? Sure he'll live. Too husky an individual to let a thing like this get him. Be weeks, maybe months, before I can get him up and around, but he'll be all right."

The sympathetic townsfolk went away, leaving but one of them to console Mrs. Lowring, Alf's mother. And that one was a young man who was Alf's best friend, "Smiling Jack" Peebles, the Jack upon whom Alf had called in his unconsciousness as he lay on the trail.

Although the old lady was relieved, in fact raised from despair to a joyous hope, consternation still showed on her trembling face as she lifted it to Smiling Jack's six-feet-three of brawn.

"I don't see what we're a-going to do now," she said tremulously. "It sure looks like the bad luck of the Lowrings still holds. It mighty near finished me when they killed pore Paw right after he'd found all that gold, buried it, and was comin' home with the news. And I thought I'd die, sure, when I see them carryin' pore Alfie home from his trip after that same gold. My pore boy! What 'll we do if, after pore Paw losing his life, and Alf mighty near losing his, some one else should happen to discover that gravel claim and accidentally stumble on the hiding place of the gold Paw and his partner took out and hid for safe keeping? Then, too, it may be the bandit that killed Paw had friends who'll keep on looking for the gold."

Smiling Jack Peebles towered above Mrs. Lowring as she sat in a low chair. Suddenly he dropped to his knees and awkwardly patted the old lady's shoulder.

His clear gray eyes were troubled, and the nearly constant little smile which earned for him his soubriquet, was settled into mechanical lines, like wrinkles.

"Don't yuh fret. Alf's goin' to be all right," he said gently.

"Yes. Thank the Lord, the doctor said so. But, I—I'm just a mite nervous, I guess. I can't seem to stop shaking so—inside me."

"No wonder," breathed the young man. Then his famous smile lifted the corners of his wide mouth. "I feel a little nervous my own self. But, now you tell me what you're aiming to do about that gold buried over there in the Green Mountains."

As the old lady spoke of the high hopes she and Alf Lowring had entertained when the young man had prepared to set out on his ill-starred trip, Jack Peebles's tanned face grew grim. The little smile still lifted the corners of his mouth, but it was as mechanical as the smile of a dancer on the stage.

But, unlike the dancer's smile, it was grim. His gray eyes narrowed as he looked straight ahead of him.

When the old lady had finished he rose to his feet and stood looking quietly down at her.

"Well, the map is here; yuh got it, ain't yuh?" he queried gently.

"Oh, yes, it's here. Alf knew it by heart, so he didn't take it."

"Well, will yuh trust me with it? Yuh willing that I should go out after that gold and bring it back with me?"

"Trust you? Why, Jack, how you talk! Course I trust you. But— No. There's been enough blood shed over that gold. I won't let you—"

"'Scuse me," Jack Peebles interrupted. "But time might be the essence of this here contract. Buried gold draws men like a molasses pot draws flies. I aim to get that gold for yuh. And I'll have to find Alf's mules and do a lot of things before I start. Now I'm goin' in to look at Alf a minute, and when I come out—yuh gimme that map."

As he stood looking down at the still unconscious young man on the bed, he mentally ran over the strange series of events which had led up to the present excitement:

The discovery of a gravel claim by Pat Lowring, father of Alf, and his partner, Johnny Baker; their removal from the gravel of several hundred ounces of gold in nugget form.

The necessity for them to go back to Purdy for more provisions and tools and their determination to bury the gold, and upon their return with tools, including a portable blacksmith's forge, mold the gold into one heavy brick, which would insure greater safety against possible theft. Accordingly, they had buried the gold, taking only enough to pay for outfitting again in Purdy; had made a crude map.

They had been surprised in their first camp on the trail, while they cooked supper. Their bodies had been found, riddled with bullets and minus the two buckskin sacks of nuggets.

However, a few days later, a Mexican sheepherder had found the two sacks and the map on the body of the bandit, which lay, crushed by a fall over the cliff, at the bottom of Chili Gulch—not two miles from the spot where the two prospectors had been murdered. The small amount of gold and the map had been sent to the widow of old Pat Lowring, and, after the funeral, young Alf had set out upon his ill-fated attempt to find the gold and relocate the rich gravel claim.

Thus Smiling Jack Peebles recapitulated as he stood looking at the quiet figure on the bed. Soon he turned away and went out, to begin his preparations for accomplishing what Alf Lowring had failed to do.

III.

In the late afternoon of the next day, The Fox hurried along a woods road on the shoulder of Thunder Mountain. His head ached cruelly, and, as he hurried, he shook it fiercely as if to shake off the fumes of an all night debauch—a celebration of his coup which he had indulged in back in the little road house in Purdy.

For once The Fox had been caught napping. He had learned that a pack train had left town the previous afternoon. He had made adroit inquiries and learned that one Smiling Jack Peebles had been seen driving two pack mules up the trail that led over Thunder Mountain.

There were tracks in the dust of the road, and he became familiar with them. Two hours more of fast walking and he suddenly stopped. Ahead of him had sounded the bray of a mule, raucous and shrill.

"He's probably made an early camp," he soliloquized, not realizing the man he sought should be miles beyond this spot. "Now, me, I'll just breeze in and give him a spiel. Le's see. I'm going on to the next town and didn't think it was so far; didn't bring any grub or blankets, and tell him I'm hungry, too, which ain't no drunken fiddler's dream, either."

Around a bend in the road lay a camp and, assuming a guileless expres-

sion, The Fox sauntered into it. But no one greeted him; the camp was unoccupied by a human being.

There were two mules. One was grazing, hobbled. The other was tethered to a tree. It acted strangely, The Fox thought; tugging at its tie rope, whinnying, anxious to get away.

A few feet beyond this mule was a bed roll, wrapped in a tarpaulin. Near the roll was a little pile of cold, white ashes between two rocks, across which a grate had been formed by two pieces of flat iron. Upon the grate was a coffeepot and a fry pan.

Bacon was in the pan, and it had been burned to a crisp and was now cold. Coffee was in the pot, black and boiled down to a thick fluid. Sand and a powder of white ashes overlay the pan and its contents.

"This is phony stuff," The Fox mused uneasily. "Where is this Jack guy? He must 'a' made this camp yesterday, started to cook a meal and beat it. Where is he, anyway?"

He peered around uneasily, half tempted to hide in the brush and await developments from this queer situation. But hunger overcame his fears.

"Aw, no," he muttered. "This can't be a trap. How could this guy suspect I was coming along? Nobody in town knows the other young fella was hijacked up on the mountain; everybody figures he was hit by a rock what fell down the bank on him. Nobody could figure me in on this gold hunt *a*-tall! I doped my scheme out too foxy for that; old Foxy Guy, that's me!"

The mule at the tree brayed loudly and tugged at the tie rope. The Foxy Guy threw a rock and hit it in the head.

"Shut up! A guy can't even think with that racket goin' on. Now, le's see. This guy's been gone all night. Maybe he hadda go back to town and— Aw, hell! What's the difference? He don't know me, and if he does come while I'm eatin', what of it?"

He found the grub sack and made fresh coffee and cut several thick slices of bacon. There were loaves of bread from town, and he cut huge slices from one. But as soon as the coffee boiled he drank scalding cups of it until tears stood in his eyes.

"Wow! Sure hits the spot," he gasped. "That hooch I had carried a kick like a mule!"

He stumbled over a pail of water and it spilled. The mule at the tree scented the water on the ground and whinnied eagerly—half famished for a drink. The Fox merely threw another rock at it.

"Shut up, will ya? You act like—"

A sound from the hillside above interrupted him. A queer, muffled sound which faintly resembled a man's voice calling. Muffled and hollow.

He stood irresolutely listening; half fearful, half puzzled. Then the bacon began to smoke and distracted his attention for a few moments. Then the sound came again.

Hastily making a sandwich of bacon and bread, he started up the hillside toward the sound, eating as he went. In a minute he located the source of the sound; it came from a clump of brush.

Parting the brush, he was about to go ahead when he saw, directly in his way, a hole in the ground, six feet or so across and partially covered over with dead brush. He dropped to his knees and peered down the hole.

"Hello. Anybody down there," he mumbled through a mouthful of food.

A hoarse voice answered him instantly:

"I'll say there is! God bless yuh, pardner! I been in here since yesterday evenin' and was about ready to give up hope of getting out."

"How you get down there?" The Fox mumbled, busily eating.

"Tell yuh when you get me out. There's ropes in camp, pardner. Get 'em here and help me up."

Fifteen minutes later, by dint of

snubbing to a convenient oak tree, The Fox pulled a man from the hole. He grinned in affected camaraderie as he noted the weary, but indomitable smile on the frankly friendly, tanned face of the man before him.

"Say," he began in apparent friendliness, "it's kind a lucky I happened along, ain't it?"

Now was the time to press the advantage he had gained. He grinned at an audacious thought—it might be barely possible to chum up with this guy, get him to take him along and thus lead him to the buried gold. Stranger things could happen, he reasoned.

"How'd you got out if I hadn't come along just out of bull luck?" he inquired.

"I wouldn't have got out," the tall, faintly smiling Westerner answered slowly. "And it wasn't just luck. Looks more like a miracle to me. And if I ever get the chance to pay yuh back— I was up here for firewood last evenin' and I fell down this old prospect hole. If it hadn't been for yuh I'd have added my life to somebody else's that was lost on the same job—"

He halted in slight confusion, remembering he could not say too much to this stranger.

"What I mean is, somebody else would have lost more than my life may be worth." To cover his embarrassment, he stepped forward with outstretched hand.

"My name's Jack Peebles," he said. "They call me Smiling Jack sometimes. Reckon that's because I don't go around lookin' like starvation and high taxes all the time."

"Me, I'm Johnny Pike from—from back East," The Fox returned. "Say, Jack, you're my kind of a guy. I never bust out in a low sob, m'self, if things don't break right. I—I'd kinda like to travel with a guy— That is— Uh, yeah."

"Which way was you going?" Jack Peebles asked quickly. The thought of a way to repay his rescuer suddenly occurred to him. "If you are footloose and not bogged down any, how'd yuh like to go along with me on a little job I got and then go back to town with me?"

The thought of possible danger to his plans did not enter his mind. How could this slim young tenderfoot become dangerous to a man like himself, Smiling Jack Peebles, whom everybody conceded to be the fastest man on the draw hereabouts?

And wouldn't Alf Lowring and his mother feel it was his duty to take this guy along and pay him handsomely for virtually saving their fortune for them? Which meant a fortune, not only of buried gold, but a valuable gravel mine, unrecorded as yet and therefore open to relocation.

"Why, me, I'm just traveling for my health," The Fox said laughingly. "I'm footloose all right. What's on your mind?"

"Well, pardner, if you'll go with me over in the Green Mountains a ways and then back to town, it's in my mind to show yuh how much your comin' along means to me and—and a couple o' others. There's a little matter of, say, five hundred dollars in it for you."

"Aw, gwan, forget it!" The Fox pretended to scoff. "Yeh don't owe me nothin' for dragging yeh up outa—"

"We won't argue the question," Jack Peebles interrupted. "When we get back to Purdy I'll be able to show you why your rescuing me is worth real money."

The Fox, who understood quite well what the rescue meant to Smiling Jack and the two people in Purdy, could have laughed aloud.

This was even better than he'd dared hope for.

Would he trail along with this guy? Huh? Oh, no!

"Well, I'll go yeh a whirl," he

grinned. Then they started down toward the camp.

"Say, I sure worried some about one of them mules while I was down that hole," Jack said suddenly. "He's a ornery cuss, ol' Sullivan is, and I had to tie him up. The other one I hobbled. Pore ol' Sullivan kept tryin' to cut back to Purdy all the time and so I tied him yesterday evenin' and he ain't been able to go get him a drink ever since. The other 'n' could water down in the gulch. But I forgot. You been there; you must have watered him."

"Why do yeh call him Sullivan?" The Fox evaded the direct implication.

"He's a fightin' fool and he packs a wallop in his hind laigs like ol' John L. Sullivan carried in his gloves. Boy, he can kick! If you ever treat him mean, he'll never forget it. And that means he'll get yuh and get yuh good, first chance. Mules is smart, Johnny Pike, yuh sabe that?"

Then they stepped into camp and, as he saw the mule still tied to the tree and eagerly sniffing in the direction of the spilled water, the smile slowly faded from Jack Peebles's face, leaving it pinched around the nostrils and lips and strangely pale. He whirled and confronted The Fox.

"Say! What kind of an hombre are you? Didn't yuh see that pore mule's starvin' for water? Why—" His wrath quickly subsided as he realized Pike might not be to blame for the oversight. "'Scuse me," he added apologetically. "I forgot yuh was a tenderfoot. I couldn't expect yuh to know—"

Without further delay the mule was untied and Jack Peebles led it over to another pail full of water. The Fox walked over and picked up the bucket when it was emptied.

"Tell me where to go and I'll fill it—"

"*Look out!*" Jack screamed. "Jump Sullivan! Get back there, you—"

There was a squeal of rage and a rush and the mule hit The Fox with a shoulder and floored him. Swift as lightning the animal reared and poised for a second, his sharp front hoofs held together, ready to descend and chop to pieces the fallen man—the old fighting trick of the born man-killer among mules.

Smiling Jack Peebles leaped and caught the swaying hackamore the mule wore. Swinging his weight on it he was able to pull the mule off balance so that the hoofs descended a foot away from the recumbent man.

The Fox scrambled to his feet.

"Say—" he began indignantly.

"Get out of the way, till I get him tied," Jack commanded. And when that was done he said apologetically:

"I'm sorry for that, but I reckon he figured you was takin' the water pail away from him. I don't suppose he remembered you didn't water him when you first came. Anyway, you better watch him for a spell, although I don't think he'll have it in for yuh for long. Mules ain't got human intelligence, yuh know."

They went about the business of getting supper. And after it had been eaten, they decided to camp there that night. As he rolled up in the blankets, The Fox grinned to himself under cover of the dark.

This was going to be easy. A pipe! It was too easy. This guy would lead him right to the gold and then—bam! Smiling Jack Peebles would smile no more. Thus, in his smug egotism, thought The Fox.

IV.

NEXT day, on the trail, The Fox talked a great deal, asking about the country, the nearest town, the nearest railroad and if many people lived hereabout.

"Well, it's kind o' lonesome," Jack replied. "Mighty few people get in here now. Once in awhile a prospec-

tor or a sheepherder. Once in a great while a bad man, hidin' out. That's about all."

"A fool for luck," The Fox gloated to himself. "This will be easy. Am I a foxy guy? Oh, no! Just dumb! Here I am in a lonely country with only one guy and his gun between me and buried gold. One gun and that'll be spiked, long before he'd have a chance to use it. Maybe I better fix that right now."

Aloud he said: "Say, Jack. I notice you pack a gun. Do you guys use them much when you're out like this?"

"Oh, once in awhile. I, that is, the boys kind o' think I'm kind o' fast with mine. And so I keep in practice when I'm alone."

"Wish yeh'd show me this here fast draw I read so much about, and some of the shootin' you Western guys are supposed to do."

Smiling Jack Peebles smiled quietly and dropped his right hand so that it hung limply at his side.

"Aw, there's not much to it," he smiled. Then he suddenly leaned forward slightly, his right shoulder twitched, there was a swift *dragging* motion to his right arm and his gun was out and spitting a staccato stream of yellow flame.

The Fox's startled eyes were almost too slow to follow the speed-blurred motions, but they followed the flame and saw a big sugarpine cone ahead of them leap mysteriously, roll and leap again, each time Peebles fired.

"My-y-y, gosh!" he breathed in awe-struck wonder. "And yeh hit the mark each time."

The Fox knew his fastest gunplay was slow motion compared to this, but he had a trick that would beat even this speed.

"Say," he asked diffidently, "would —would yeh let me shoot that gun?"

Jack Peebles assented cheerfully and reloaded the gun and handed it over.

"Hop to it," he grinned.

The Fox selected a pine cone and purposely missed it at each shot.

"That's how good *I* am," he said ruefully. "Well, I can clean it for yeh, anyway. And hand over some shells. I'll load it up."

He ejected the empty shells, but surreptitiously slipped them into a pocket. And after he had cleaned the weapon, he slipped the empty shells back into the cylinder. He carefully watched Jack as the Westerner took the gun, and his own hand was on the flat automatic pistol in his hip pocket; in case the substitution be noticed. But Jack did not glance at his gun.

The Fox grinned behind Peebles's back. "Oh, yeah, I'm a dumb ape," he soliloquized. "Me, I'm not a foxy guy, huh?"

Smiling Jack Peebles drove one mule ahead of him. The Sullivan mule came next and The Fox brought up the rear.

"He's still stubborn about this trip, for some reason," Jack had explained the order of procedure. "So this way you can keep him from turning back and I can watch the trail ahead of me."

The Fox had been nursing a vicious resentment because of the mule's murderous enmity of the preceding night. And, now that conversation lagged, he evolved a method of persecution that pleased him.

He found it very satisfactory fun to annoy the beast in many ways, chief among which was to tickle it in the tender flanks with a alder switch. This constant teasing won protests from the laden animal.

It lashed out at times with a quick, murderous hoof, squealing. Once it kicked mighty with both hoofs and squealed in futile rage.

Smiling Jack turned impatiently.

"Aw, come on, Sullivan. Quit that now. You're going through with this trip till I find the gol—uh, you come on now. Wait a minute. I will fix yuh."

He took a small rope and tied the mule's hackamore to the tail of the

front mule. "Now I'll go on ahead and yuh gotta follow."

V.

THE next afternoon they arrived at the location marked on the map Smiling Jack carried. In a wide cañon was a recently constructed lean-to shack, made of dry poles and thatched with alder shoots, set in a clump of oak brush, a few feet from running water.

There was a little pile of rusted tin cans outside the door of the shack, a chopping log and an ax beside it.

"Well, we're here," Jack said quietly. "I'll unpack and I wish you'd take the ax, yonder, and go cut some dry manzanita for a cookin' fire. Plenty of dead manzanita on the hillside."

The Fox went into the brush a little way. Then he stopped and sneaked back until he could see Peebles. Something told him he had been sent here merely to be out of the way.

His instinct was right. Jack Peebles had abandoned the mule and was standing a few feet from the shack, looking at a piece of paper in his hands. He glanced all round, looked up toward the brush where The Fox was hidden, and walked directly to an oak tree that had a blaze on its trunk, ten feet off the ground.

He turned his back to this and began pacing in a straight line to another oak. He paced the line, turned to the right and walked five steps toward the shack. Then he made a mark in the ground with his heel and went and got a shovel from the pack.

In a moment he was digging and the man peering from the brush felt his pulse beating like a trip-hammer as he watched the dirt fly before that shovel in Peebles's hands. Then his eyes glistened as he saw Smiling Jack stop digging, stoop over and lift something heavy from the hole he had dug.

The Westerner carried the object over toward where the mules stood, then returned and got another burden. Next he took an old coat from one pack and carelessly dropped it over the objects he had brought from the hole. In a minute he was back at work, carefully filling in the excavation he had made.

The Fox grinned to himself.

"Pretty foxy himself," he muttered. "That's pretty near a sure way to hide anything. I s'pose he'd leave them there until to-night, then get them hidden in a pack and, in a day or so, we shove off, back to Purdy. Well, I'm some foxy guy m'self. Watch my smoke."

He returned a few feet into the brush, then noisily came out again, calling to Peebles:

"Say, Jack. I guess I'm kinda dumb, but I don't know a manzanita bush from a spear of bullrush."

Jack turned and pretended to be surprised.

"Why, say, that's right," he smiled. "I plumb forgot about you bein' a tenderfoot when I sent yuh out for manzanita. Well, I'll go get some. Wish yuh'd untie the ropes on the two packs. Just start at this end of the rope and keep on to the other end."

The Fox waited until Peebles was out of sight and then he stepped over to the spot where Jack's old coat covered the bulging objects on the ground. He tossed the coat aside and fell to his knees before two burlap sacks and thrust his hands into them.

He was trembling with excitement and his hands shook as they came out filled with dull yellow gold; two great handfuls of it.

He played with the gold for a minute, like a miser with his yellow coins, running the nuggets through his fingers back into the sacks and scooping them up again.

Then he realized the need for quick action. The sole thought in his gold-fevered mind was to get the gold packed on a mule and away from here before Smiling Jack Peebles returned.

But he did not forget that if it came

to gunplay, he, alone was capable of killing—he grinned as he thought of Jack's useless gun with the empty brass shells. One or two short barks from his own automatic and this trusting Westerner would fade out of the picture.

It took him five minutes to get the gold lashed to the full pack of the nearest mule.

Then a rope slipped and the sacks fell down and burst open, spilling their contents upon the ground.

With an exasperated cry he fell to his knees and clutched at the heavy mass, scooping it to a central pile, then he glanced around for something to put it into.

Suddenly came the voice of Smiling Jack Peebles:

"Sa-a-y! What's the big idea? You—"

The Fox snarled—as nearly as a man can snarl—and with the sinuous swiftness of a fox, he whirled and leaped. And when he stopped he stood ten feet from Peebles.

His deadly, flat automatic was in his hand and trained full upon the startled Westerner.

Peebles's right arm slowly went limp at his side and he leaned slightly forward.

The Fox knew the signs; knew that, once again, he was to see that lightning-fast draw.

And he laughed suddenly, laughed aloud with diabolic merriment as he watched the movements that would end in such futility.

Totally unaware of his pitiful helplessness, Jack Peebles threw his gun and pulled the trigger with the swiftness of a flash of lightning.

The hammer fell on the first empty cartridge with a dull click. Again the hammer rose and fell and then, as he realized the predicament he was in, Jack hurled the useless gun at the now grinning Fox.

The latter dodged it with a quick duck and slowly, very, very slowly, he advanced toward Smiling Jack Peebles; with the viciousness of an animal he wanted to prolong the moment before he leaped to the kill.

He held his automatic at the level of his waist, his arm crooked and rigid.

Then the one thing he could not have foreseen happened.

The next step toward Smiling Jack Peebles—who at that moment was tensing his muscles for a desperate leap upon the viciously grinning menace—brought The Fox abreast of the Sullivan mule.

And his rigidly held elbow brushed against the tender spot in the mule's flanks where he had so often applied the alder switch.

With a squeal that was almost a scream; a squeal of berserk rage, the infuriated mule whirled. Its long ears were flattened against its head, and the long, pendulous lips were drawn tight against the long, yellow teeth. With one smashing blow of his great shoulder the mule hurled The Fox to the ground.

The Fox's pistol shot harmlessly into the air and the man's terror-mad scream mingled with the crack of the weapon. He screamed again, just once, as the squealing mule reared and descended, to chop and crush and smash the hated figure on the ground. Then he screamed no more, nor moved again.

After he had done all that could be done, Smiling Jack Peebles took to the trail with the gold securely packed; but not before he had paced out the claim and posted notices.

After awhile Peebles walked beside the drooping head of the man-killer mule.

"It was his life or mine," he said aloud, and the mule's ears twitched. "He sure had it figured out to a T. Pretty foxy scheme, at that. But it took a foxy guy like you to upset it. Giddap!"

THE END

Masked Men

By LEO MARGULIES

A swift holdup in a cow town and the strange fashion in which accounts were adjusted

FROM out of nowhere, to break the lazy, almost sullen stillness of the little cow town, came the sudden mad galloping of a horse being ridden at a terrific pace. Faster and faster, down the one and only street, traveled the big, white stallion, urged on in a wild frenzy by a grimly masked youth. With one hand he goaded on the flying steed, and with the other, loosely and freely, he held a gun.

Before the bank messenger, halfway from the steps of the bank to his waiting flivver, could realize what was happening, the lone horseman was upon him. Guns barked. And on the brick sidewalk, a few feet from the car, lay the writhing form of a man shot through the shoulder in the performance of his duty. This month's shipment of gold was destined to miss the Denver train!

Again the lone, wild horseman urged on his white stallion—this time into the freedom of the hills beyond.

Confusion gripped those who witnessed the swiftly enacted drama. Dazed and bewildered by the suddenness of it all—precious minutes flew by before they realized what had happened during the wild dash of the bandit. With the appearance of the sheriff it was only a matter of a few minutes before a hastily formed posse was in swift pursuit.

The clatter of hoofs, followed by shots, brought Hank Perris, proprietor of the town's general store, rushing to

the street. He had been anxious and worried all day by the continued absence of his assistant.

Young Frank Chandler had been as a son to him—since the death of the boy's father, his best friend, ten years ago. He had taken the boy in and reared him as his own.

However, within the last few months, soon after the advent of Bill Hicks, a notorious gambler, Perris had noticed a change in his protégé. Instigating an investigation in his quiet, efficient manner, he discovered with alarm that Frank was steadily taking money from the store, faking his accounts, and using it to gamble.

Further disclosures revealed that Frank was heavily in debt to Bill Hicks, who had threatened to tell on him if the money was not forthcoming within the week.

As he rushed into the street he caught a glimpse of the white stallion racing by, with its youthful rider clutching tightly a bag of gold. Horror-stricken, he gazed after them, for he had recognized the masked horseman. In the whole valley there was only one person who rode a horse in that peculiar manner—and that person was Frank Chandler.

Saddened at the sudden turn of events, Hank shambled toward the bank. As he walked a desperate plan was forming in his mind.

From the excited mutterings of the crowd he gathered that nobody else had recognized the bandit. He waited around until after the departure of the posse before returning to the store preparatory to turning his hastily formed plans into action.

He remembered that a few years ago, on one of their many trips into the mountains, Frank had discovered a cave, far from the beaten trails, that showed plainly it had not been used in several years. From time to time Frank had gone to his discovery, always returning to report that the secret of the cave was still theirs.

The cave would probably be the natural place that Frank was heading for now. The boy's plan evidently was to hide the gold and return for it later, when the furor in town had subsided. Hank felt that the success of his undertaking depended upon Frank doing just this.

He quickly changed into his riding clothes, stuffed a roll of bills into his pocket, together with a hastily fashioned small, black mask. He then dashed around to the stables and saddled his fastest horse. And within a short time he was riding swiftly into the distant hills.

When he was still some distance from the hidden cave, Hank dismounted, and tying his horse in the shelter of a clump of trees, proceeded cautiously on foot. As he moved along the storekeeper adjusted his improvised mask, so that Frank Chandler would not recognize him.

With gun drawn, Hank climbed up the winding, hidden trail that led to the little cave on the mountainside. Rounding a bend in the trail he suddenly came upon Frank Chandler as the boy was peering anxiously down into the cañon below.

His back was toward Hank, and it was but a moment before the latter had moved silently nearer until now he was within speaking distance.

"Hands up!" he growled in a hoarse, croaking voice that he was sure Frank would not recognize. "And don't make any foolish moves."

The boy turned, reaching for his gun as he did so. But the sight of the muzzle of the heavy Colt pointing at him as it was held in the steady hand of the masked man, made him hesitate, and he did not draw his own weapon.

"Yuh been tryin' tuh put somethin' over on me, ain't yuh?" Hank croaked. "Listen, kid, I been wantin' that pertikiler gold—I was gonna stick up the messenger myself this mornin'."

Before Frank more than half realized what had happened, Hank had

moved swiftly forward and taken the bag of gold away from the boy, and then stepped back—the heavy Colt still pointing at Frank's heart.

"Yuh're Frank Chandler, ain't yuh?" he went on hoarsely. "I always thought yuh was honest—what's the idea of yuh doin' this?"

"I was in a tight place." The boy was young, he had to tell some one his troubles. "Bill Hicks threatened me with disgrace if I did not pay him what I owed him by to-morrow."

"How much is it?" asked Hank.

"Five hundred dollars." Frank laughed mirthlessly. "It's not such a lot to have shot and robbed a man for, is it? And now I've lost it all to you."

"No, it ain't," said Hank. "Listen, kid, I'm gonna give you what no one ever gave me, and that's a chance—to start over." With his left hand he reached into his trousers pocket and drew out a roll of bills. "Here's a little over five hundred dollars; that's all yuh owe, ain't it?"

Frank nodded mutely, puzzled at the unexpected action of the masked man.

"All right, then." Beneath his mask Hank laughed. "A fair exchange ain't no robbery. Yuh get what yuh want—a chance tuh start over, and I gets what I been plannin' on, and that's the gold from the bank. I ain't showin' any objections, either, tuh takin' the blame for the shootin'—one more crime on my head don't make any difference tuh me.

"But years ago Hank Perris was my friend—and I know what stock he sets in yuh—so if yuh'll agree to go back and go straight and leave the gamblin' alone—I'll be doin' Hank a favor I been owin' him for a long time. How about it?"

"All right," said Frank. "I realize that I've been a fool. I should have gone right to Hank Perris with my troubles in the first place, and he would have found a way out for me. He's been mighty good to me always."

"Go on," said Hank impatiently. "Get back tuh town as quick as yuh can. I figure the posse is already out searchin' for yuh now, an' yuh don't want them tuh find yuh at all—hurry."

He threw the roll of bills at Frank's feet.

"I stole Hank Perris's horse, a little while ago in town, mine was winded. Yuh take the horse and leave me the white stallion—they'll be lookin' for that. Yuh'll find Hank's horse tied in them cottonwoods just outside th' cañon—now get out 'fore I change my mind an' take a shot at yuh."

Frank did not hesitate any longer, but picked up the roll of bills and moved swiftly back along the trail and soon had disappeared from sight.

Hank sighed as he watched him go. The boy was such a reckless fool—but he had realized that he was wrong in what he had done. The older man was glad he had been able to aid him.

It was two hours later that a posse, led by Sheriff Edwards and his men, came upon Hank Perris as the latter sat gazing at his worn Stetson which bore a bullet hole in its crown.

"What's the matter, Hank?" asked the sheriff.

"The fellow that held up the bank messenger and me just been doing a little shooting," Hank answered. "I got him in the arm and made him drop the gold, but he got away."

He shook his head.

"A little lower with this shot of his through my hat and I wouldn't be telling you about it now," he grinned. "He took my horse, too; he must be halfway across the border by now. But we got the gold, anyway, and that's something."

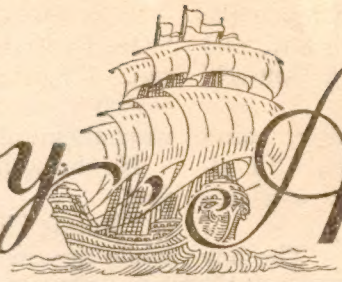
He handed the sheriff the bag of gold.

"Yea," said Edwards, "that's somethin'. You've been a great help, Hank."

"Yes." Hank nodded, the thought of Frank in his mind. "I reckon I did do a little good, sheriff, at that!"

THE END

Ahoy Ahead!



COMING EVENTS

Next Week, May 12:

A long Complete Novelette with a lively account of goings on in cowboy country

THE JOKE AT "UPSET J"

By GARRET SMITH

Here you'll have a game of cross purposes in rangeland that wasn't started for the fun of the thing and which culminates in a big surprise

In the way of short stories there will be some corkers including

GO FAR AND GET HIM

By CHARLTON L. EDHOLM

In which bandits and cowboys keep things on the move near the Mexican border.

A MAN OF HIGH AMBITION

By LAURANCE M. HARE

Wherein the reader will be pretty certain to find an old friend bobbing up.

Coming May 19

THE GREAT EVENT OF THE SPRINGTIME

THE APACHE DEVIL

The Start of the Great New Serial

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

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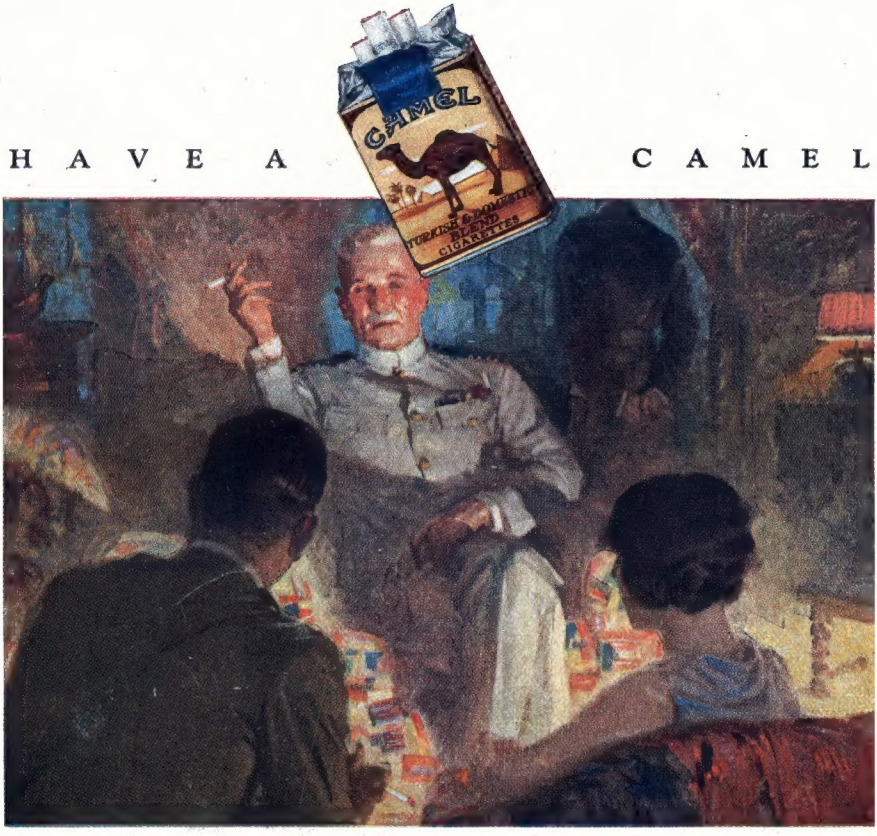
H A V E A



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